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# THE GREAT WAR. **I WAS THERE!**

**UNDYING MEMORIES OF 1914-1918**

*Edited by*

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*Editor of*

**WORLD WAR 1914-1918**

*Writer of*

**FORGOTTEN MEN**

*The Famous War Film*



**MANY HUNDREDS OF  
UNPUBLISHED PHOTOS**



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### With Acknowledgements to Authors and Publishers

WEEK by week we acknowledge here our indebtedness to the many authors and publishers without whose courteous permission to reprint selected pages from the books written and published by them the compilation of the present work could not have been achieved. In our volumes as finally bound these acknowledgements will be repeated in the preliminary pages.

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## Leaves from the Editor's Note-Book

John Carpenter House, London, E.C.4

**A**S I have already indicated in this Note-Book, the present Part completes our first volume, and I WAS THERE is now arranged to make three convenient volumes of 17 Parts each. I am, in fact, in the position of having to resist the pleas of numbers of my readers to extend the work almost—as two more of them put it in letters just received—without limit! It would, of course, be perfectly easy, with the immense amount of material available, to carry a work of this nature on to 100 Parts. But readers who make suggestions of this kind forget, I think, that we are concerned not with a magazine or periodical but with a planned book. And while, in the early stages, a certain amount of elasticity is permissible and even necessary, as I indicated in publishing the Outline Scheme for Part I, a point must be reached fairly early in the progress of the work when a decision both as to the number of volumes and the precise number of Parts to make up those volumes is essential.

**I**T became obvious, from the progress of my intensive examination of the human stories of the War, before we had reached much more than the half-way point in our first intended volume, that not only was the mass of that enthralling material greater than I had thought, but that the demands of my readers to include as much of it as possible indicated they would be disappointed if I reduced the scope of my selections to anything less than the 51 Parts with which we are now making up the three volumes. I feel sure that my readers without exception will approve this decision.

**T**HE details published in last week's Part about the Binding Cases which have been prepared for I WAS THERE must have stimulated many of my readers to send in their orders for the binding of the first volume in the cases which the publishers are now ready to supply. I would now very strongly urge that there should be no delay in sending in their orders, for not only will the handsome and hard-wearing cases which have been prepared provide a volume which all ex-servicemen of whatever rank will be proud to see upon their shelves, but that binding will afford a very necessary means of protecting the weekly Parts from

damage and soiling. It is particularly necessary in the case of a work such as I WAS THERE, which is distinguished by its finely produced illustrations, so many of which are printed in special inks on special paper, to get it into permanent form as early as possible. Pages which are constantly turned over in reading and re-reading may only too soon become dog-eared if they are left in the paper covers of the weekly Parts. This is a theme upon which I have often enlarged in connexion with my serial publications; but I do lay special stress on it in the present case.

**M**Y postbag—which shows no signs of becoming any less bulky and has in fact increased lately, particularly at Christmas time when these notes are made—includes a large number of letters from men "who were there," who tell me in simple and direct, if sometimes rather crude, language something of what they went through in one or more aspects of the fighting. These mainly come, of course, from the infantry, although a certain number of gunners and horsed units are represented.

**S**OME of these are sent with the perfectly sincere hope that they may be printed in the pages of our work and thereby help to establish contact with other men of the same units who also were there and have perhaps survived. This aspect of their contributions is dealt with through our "Old Comrades' Corner," where the wish for such contact is definitely expressed. (I hope, by the way, to begin the "corner" again in our next Part.) It is with very real regret that I find it practically impossible in a very large number of cases to reprint these letters and stories as chapters in our work. It is not merely a question of literary standards, for although those which have been printed in I WAS THERE have reached a uniformly high standard of human expression, literary graces are not in fact necessary or even specially desirable for the inclusion of a story in our pages.

**A** VERY good example of this type of contribution is a little article-story sent by Mr. E. G. Robinson of his experiences in Trônes Wood on July 12-13, 1916. Mr.

[Continued in page iii of this wrapper]



**BRIEF SLEEP BEFORE BATTLE—AND THEN?**

In a narrow support trench dug beside a road, these tin-hatted warriors snatched a short rest before moving on to play their part in the attack on Beaumont-Hamel, which opened in the early hours of July 1, 1916. The assault on the village, which was carried out by the 86th Brigade, failed within a few minutes of the British troops leaving their trenches, when No Man's Land was raked with withering fire from the waiting enemy.

*Imperial War Museum*



#### **HE CAN SIT UP AND TAKE NOTICE**

British soldiers were always ready to help wounded German prisoners, and unwounded prisoners were often detailed to lend a hand as stretcher-bearers. Here four German prisoners, who have come through the fight scatheless, are carrying shoulder high a stretcher on which is a wounded British soldier. He is still very much alive and able to sit up and wave a remonstrance to a photographer who is "snapping" him in this undignified position.

*Photo, Imperial War Museum*

Just before we move off for Speyside [Highland names were commonly used for trench positions in this area.—Ed.], under the steep bank of which we are to shelter, Woods, my second-in-command, comes up. "March with me," I say, "the nearer the better as I have some things to tell you."

**A**T that moment a colonel approaches. I know him. His face is as white as death. "Look at his face," I say to Woods: "what's wrong with him?" I ask. "He fears death," says the dry Ulsterman; "but not as much as I do!" he adds with a laugh.

I blow my whistle. We're off across the causeways of the Ancre. Thanks to our supremacy in the air, which has cost us countless noble young lives, not a German machine is in sight. Maurice Day, the brigade-major, cheery as ever, meets us as we reach the wood, just to strike a lively note. Two German shells drop in the water twenty yards to our left. Is that chance or do they suspect? Ranging perhaps, for future use; but they have no observation from above or on the ground; our Flying Corps has seen to that. A dense mist from the marshes has, in any case, made observation difficult. We turn left. We have gone to Speyside "tail first," for "A" company has to lead out. I let all pass and follow "A." Dear old Bernard [a fellow battalion commander] comes up with his little lot and snuggles in on our right as he has to lead off at 8 a.m. to clear us for our advance.

**S**UDDENLY the air is rent with deafening thunder; never has such man-made noise been heard before! The hour has struck! 7.30 a.m. has arrived. The first wave goes over, "carrying the creeping barrage on its back." We wait. Instantly the enemy replies, putting down a counter-barrage which misses us by inches. Thanks to the steep slope of Speyside, we are immune. That half-hour is the worst on record for thoughts and forebodings; so we sing, but it is difficult to keep in tune or rhythm on account of the noise. At last *our* minute, *our own* minute, arrives. I get up from the ground and whistle. The others rise.

We move off with steady pace. As we pass Gordon Castle we pick up coils of wire and iron posts. I feel sure in my innermost thoughts these things will never be carried all the way to the final objective; however, even if they get half-way it will be a help.

Then I glance to the right through a gap in the trees. I see the 10th Rifles plodding on and then my eyes are riveted on a sight I shall never see again. It is the 32nd Division at its best.

I see rows upon rows of British soldiers lying dead, dying or wounded in No Man's Land. Here and there I see an officer urging on his followers. Occasionally I can see the hands thrown up and then a body flops to the ground.

**T**HE bursting shells and smoke make visibility poor, but I see enough to convince me Thiepval village is still held, for it is now 8 a.m., and by 7.45 a.m. it should have fallen to allow of our passage forward on its flank: Bernard was right. My upper lip is stiff, my jaws are set. We proceed. Again I look southward from a different angle and perceive heaped-up masses of British corpses suspended on the German wire in front of the Thiepval stronghold, while live men rush forward in orderly

procession to swell the weight of numbers in the spider's web. Will the last available and previously detailed man soon appear to do his futile duty unto death on the altar of sacrifice? We march on—I lose sight of the 10th Rifles and the human corn-stalks falling before the Reaper. My pace unconsciously quickens, for I am less heavily burdened than the men behind me, and at last I see the light of day through the telescopic-like avenue which has been cut for our approach. We are nearing the fringe of the wood and the old fire trench. Shells burst at the rate of six a minute on this trench junction, for we have been marching above Elgin Avenue and alongside it.

My adjutant, close behind me, tells me I am fifty yards in front of the head of the column. I slacken my pace and

#### WHEN MINUTES SEEMED LIKE HOURS

In this support trench, crudely hacked out but providing good cover, infantrymen are seen apparently relaxing and at ease. They belong to a working party which, with spades and wire-cutters (one of which is seen on the end of a rifle), will follow the attack and help to consolidate the positions gained. The photograph was taken shortly before zero hour on July 1, 1916, when the Somme offensive, with its holocaust involving thousands of brave British soldiers, first unfolded.

Imperial War Museum





they close up to me. "Now for it," I say to Hine; "it's like sitting back for an enormous fence." My blood is up and I am literally seeing red. Still the shells burst at the head of Elgin, plomp, plomp—it is "good-bye," I think, as there is no way round. "This way to eternity," shouts a wag behind. Thirty yards ahead now, still a shell—plomp—a splinter flies past my shoulder and embeds itself in the leg of a leading man behind. He falls and crawls out of the way, nothing must stop the forward march of the column. "Lucky b—," says one of his pals, "you're well out of it, Jimmy; good luck to you; give 'em our love; see you later," and so the banter continues. It's the only way.

#### NOTHING CAN STOP US!

THE blood swells in my veins. God is merciful, and it almost seems as though he chloroforms us on these occasions. I cross the fire trench. The next shell and I should have absolutely synchronized. It does not arrive! "What's up?" I think. Still once more too far ahead, I wait on the edge of the wood. They close up once more. I double out to see what's up on the right. Bernard, where is he? Machine-guns open fire on us from Thiepval village; their range is wrong: "Too high," I say to Hine.

I survey the situation still; more machine-gun fire; they have lowered their sights: *pit, pit*, the bullets hit the dry earth all round. The shelling on to the wood edge has ceased. The men emerge. A miracle has happened. "Now's the chance," I think to myself, "they must quicken pace and get diagonally across to the sunken road, disengaging from each other quickly, company by company." I stand still and erect in the open, while each company passes. To each commander I give the amended order. Men are falling here and there, but the guns previously firing on the edge of the wood are quite silent. First passes "A" with Montey [Captain Montgomery] at its head. His is the longest double to the flank.

GEORGE GAFFIKIN [company commander] comes next waving an orange handkerchief. "Good-bye, sir; good luck," he shouts to me, en passant; "tell them I died a teetotaler. Put it on the stone if you find me." "Good luck, George," I say; "don't talk rot. Anyhow you played the game!" He died that day after behaving with magnificent courage and fortitude when stricken down. The baby captain of "C" comes next. Never demonstrative, he thinks the more, and passes on to play his part until he finds himself in a casualty

clearing station with Montey, later. "D" brings up the rear with Berry [company commander] at its head.

Imagine a timed exposure with your camera. The button is pressed, the shutter opens, another press and it again shuts. That is what happened to us. The German shelling ceased for five minutes, we hurried through the gap of mercy, and as Major Woods, bringing up the rear, was just clear of Elgin, the shelling started again. Most of the men were spared for a further few hours of strenuous life that day. Berry is badly wounded, and, with Gold, later finds himself in Germany. On the 3rd I report him killed. Men have seen him lying dead. They are positive. Men in battle see fairies—and devils. He is found in Germany through the Geneva organization, much to my surprise. His people write me an indignant letter asking me what I meant by saying he is dead! The war has made men's minds distorted. I send a post card back: "Why not count your blessings?"

#### IT WAS THEIR LAST JOURNEY

THE battalion is now formed up lying down on the road. They are enfiladed from Thiepval village while field guns open on them from the front. They can't stay there. Where is Colonel Bernard? I walk over to find out. I find a few men of the 10th, and attach them to the right of my line. I blow shrill whistle calls and signal the advance. They go on their last journey. "Bunny" . . . comes up to me. He has lost his way.

I set him on his path. Later he dies at the head of his company. And what of the dead and wounded? This spirited dash across No Man's Land, carried out as if on parade, has cost us some fifty dead and seventy disabled. The dead no longer count. War has no use for dead men. With luck they will be buried later; the wounded try to crawl back to our lines. Some are hit again in so doing, but the majority lie out all day, sun-baked, parched, uncared for, often delirious and at any rate in great pain. My immediate duty is to look after the situation and not bother about wounded men. I send a message to brigade and move to my battle headquarters in the wood. It is a deep dug-out which has been allocated to me for my use. It needs to be deep to keep out heavy stuff. The telephone lines are all cut by shell fire. Kelly, a burly six-feet-two-inches-high Irish Nationalist, has been sent in a week before to look after emergency rations. He has endured the preliminary bombardment for a week already with the dead and dying, during which time he has had difficulty in going outside, even at night and then only between the shells.

A wrong thing has been done. I find the place full of dead and wounded men. It has been used as a refuge. None of the wounded can walk. There are no stretchers. Most are in agony. They have seen no doctor. Some have been there for days. They have simply been pushed down the steep thirty-feet-deep entrance out of further harm's way and left—perhaps forgotten.

As I enter the dug-out I am greeted with the most awful cries from these dreadfully wounded men. Their removal is a Herculean task, for it was never intended that the dying and the helpless should have to use the deep stairway. After a time, the last sufferer and the last corpse are removed.

MEANWHILE I mount the parapet to observe. The attack on the right has come to a standstill; the last detailed man has sacrificed himself on the German wire to the God of War. Thiepval village is masked with a wall of corpses.

The adjutant of the 10th tells me Colonel Bernard is no more. The Colonel and half his men walked into the barrage of death during the advance. All died behind him as he resolutely faced the edge of the wood in an impossible effort to walk through a wall of raining iron and lead, which had lifted for us that brief five minutes.

#### THEY FELL LIKE GRASS

ALL at once there is a shout. Someone seizes a Lewis gun. "The Germans are on us," goes round like wildfire. I see an advancing crowd of field grey. Fire is opened at six hundred yards range. The men behind the guns have been with Bernard in the shambles. Their nerves are utterly unstrung. The enemy fall like grass before the scythe. "Damned—" shouted an officer, "give them hell." I look through my glasses. "Good heavens," I shout, "those men are prisoners surrendering, and some of our own wounded men are escorting them! Cease fire, cease fire, for God's sake," I command. The fire ripples on for a time. The target is too good to lose. "After all, they are only Germans," I hear a youngster say. But I get the upper hand at last—all is now quiet—for a few moments. The tedium of the battle continues.

I hear a rumour about Riflemen retiring on the left and go out to "stop the rot." At the corner of Elgin I wait to head them off. Meanwhile I see a German soldier, unarmed, sitting at a newly made shell-hole. I ask him if he speaks English. He does. He was once a waiter in Bude in Cornwall. He is fed up with the war, and glad to be where he is. I advise him to move away, or he will not be there long as his countrymen shell that place badly. He thanks



me. I offer him a cigarette. His eyes light up. He does not smoke although he takes it. I ask him why. He points to his throat. "Roach," I call out, "any water in your bottle? If so, give this fellow some." He drinks the bottle dry and is profuse to Roach in his thanks.

"Might he stay with me," he asks. "You will be safer behind, old cock," I say. No, he would like to stay!

"Take him to the dug-out, Roach," I say, "give him some food and let him sleep—he tells me he hasn't slept for ten days on account of the shelling."

**T**HE old sailor and the ex-German waiter walk along together, comparing notes and talking of England. Suddenly there is a cloud of smoke, a deafening roar—exit Roach and the unknown German soldier, killed by a German shell.

At that moment a strong rabble of tired, hungry and thirsty stragglers approach me from the east. I go out to meet them. "Where are you going?" I ask. One says one thing, one another. They are marched to the water reserve,

given a drink and hunted back to fight. Another more formidable party cuts across to the south. They mean business. They are damned if they are going to stay, it's all up. A young sprinting subaltern heads them off. They push by him. He draws his revolver and threatens them. They take no notice. He fires. Down drops a British soldier at his feet. The effect is instantaneous. They turn back to the assistance of their comrades in distress.

**I**T is now late afternoon. Most of my officers are dead and wounded. I send for twelve more who have been held in reserve, to swell the corpse roll. Other reinforcements arrive only to be thrown into the melting-pot for a similar result. The Germans launch an overwhelming counter-attack which proves successful. They win—to suffer later. At 10 p.m. the curtain rings down on hell. The cost? Enormous. I have seventy men left, all told, out of seven hundred.



#### TERRORS OF THE SUNKEN ROAD

Like all sunken roads, those near Beaumont-Hamel had an evil reputation. The value of such a natural protection to those who held the ground through which it ran was so obviously great that the enemy artillery quickly found the range and shelled such roads so constantly that they became death-traps. But even sunken roads had to be crossed, and above a wounded man, helped by a comrade, is crawling across that at Beaumont-Hamel on hands and knees, the only precaution possible. The British soldier below, approaching the sunken road with a wounded man on his back, will have to take a bigger risk in the crossing.

*Imperial War Museum*

# A BRASS-HAT BLUNDER

## And the Brigadier who Spoke His Mind

by LI. Wyn Griffith



**LONDON WELSHMAN**

The author of this chapter became, during the war, a captain in the 15th (London Welch) Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers and during the action at Mametz was attached to the staff of the 115th Brigade. He is now Editor of the journal of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion.

**W**E set off up the hill, passing the grey and red ruins of Mametz village on our left as we walked up towards Pommiers Redoubt. The guns were firing, and an occasional shell-burst crashed through the air with a venomous answer. Transport was crawling about in the distance; small groups of men were moving, dark against the white gashes in the chalk. Scattered equipment lying about underfoot, tangles of wire, small dumps of forgotten stores, all left behind in the advance. Other things were left behind in the advance, part of the purchase price of this downland, grim disfigured corpses rotting in the sun, so horrible in their discolour that it called for an act of faith to believe that these were once men, young men, sent to this degradation by their fellow men.

One thought ran in and out of the mind like a shuttle in a loom; any one of the thousands of seconds in this July day might reduce Taylor [Brigade Signalling Officer] or myself into a like travesty of living man, useless lumber best thrown away near some such heap of rubble as Mametz, "where Ruin calls his brother Death." There was some comfort in the thought that my wife did not know that this day held for me any fuller measure of danger than any other day of war; that for her there was no greater straining of the tense string that ran from hope to fear. And if I were killed, I would turn from man to memory in her heart without leaving a mutilated shell of flesh to haunt her eyes.

**SUBALTERN** officer in a famous Welsh regiment, Mr. Wyn Griffith at the outbreak of the battle of the Somme was attached to Brigade headquarters. His moving story of the early incidents of a great struggle is accentuated by the heroic conduct of his Brigadier, an elderly, brave, and humane officer to whom fell the thankless duty of disagreeing with superior orders.

"I haven't seen anything of my young brother for some days," I said to Taylor. "I wonder what he is doing. He's such a kid, for all his uniform. He ought to be still in school, not in this bloody shambles."

"He's all right," replied Taylor. "I saw him last night. The brigade called for two runners from each battalion, and he came as one of them—he's somewhere near that old German dug-out we came from."

"I wish I'd known. It was his birthday two days ago, and I've got a little present for him in my valise. I wonder if he'll ever see another birthday. . . . I don't know how I could face my mother if anything happened to him and I got through."

"Well, he's got a chance, Griff—he might be in the line. What do you think of our job today?"

"The General was cursing last night at his orders. He said that only a



**ALL THAT REMAINED OF MAMETZ**

Above is the village of Mametz, of whose grey and red ruins Mr. Wyn Griffith writes in this page. It was taken by the 7th Division on July 1, the day on which the first part of the battle of the Somme, known as the battle of Albert, began. In the photograph the village is seen soon after its occupation by the British, and it shows how effective was the preliminary bombardment.

Imperial War Museum



madman could have issued them. He called the Divisional Staff a lot of plumbers, herring-gutted at that. He argued at the time, and asked for some control over the artillery that is going to cover us, but he got nothing out of them. We are not allowed to attack at dawn: we must wait for the show at Contalmaison, well away on our left."

"We'll get a good view of that show from Pommiers Redoubt."

"I DARE say, but don't you think that it is a funny thing to keep us waiting in the lobby? We are going to attack Mametz Wood from one side, and Contalmaison is on the other side of the wood—why shouldn't both attacks be made at the same time? It would spread out the German fire."

"I suppose it would spread out ours, too," said Taylor, "but if you are going to start asking 'Why' about orders, you'll soon be off the Staff or off your head. You might as well say, 'Why attack the wood at all?'"

"But I do say that, Taylor. Look at it now—it's a forest. What damage can our guns do to that place? If you had a good dug-out near the edge of that wood, and a machine-gun, how many men would you allow to cross that slope leading up to the wood? You'd mow them down as soon as they stood up."

We had reached the high ground at Pommiers Redoubt, and, standing in a trench, scanning the wood with our glasses, it seemed as thick as a virgin forest. There was no sign of life in it, no one could say whether it concealed ten thousand men or ten machine-guns. Its edges were clean cut, as far as the eye could see, and the ground between us and the wood was bare of any sort of cover.

#### WHY THE GENERAL CURSED

OUR men were assembled in trenches above a dip in the ground, and from these they were to advance, descend into the hollow, and cross the bare slope in the teeth of the machine-guns in the wood. On their right, as they advanced across the bullet-swept zone, they would be exposed to enfilade fire, for the direction of their advance was nearly parallel to the German trenches towards Bazentin, and it would be folly to suppose that the German machine-guns were not sited to sweep that slope leading to the wood.

"I'm not surprised that the General cursed when he got his orders," said Taylor. "The truth about the Brigadier is that he's got too much sense. He was soldiering when some of the

fellows above him were still playing marbles. I'm going to see my signallers . . . I'll see you later."

A little farther along the trench a group of officers were engaged in a discussion over a map spread out on a box. I went up to speak to them, and found that this was the headquarters of a group of Heavy Artillery concerned in the bombardment of Contalmaison, and about to wipe it off the map, as I gathered.

Taylor came up out of a dug-out.

"We're through to the old Brigade Headquarters, the Division, and to the battalions. How long we'll be through



#### THE GENERAL WHO WENT HOME

Above is Brigadier-General H. J. Evans who, as related in this chapter, saved his Brigade, the 115th, from annihilation at Mametz Wood by insisting on withdrawing his troops from an untenable position. Later on, during a reconnaissance after he had been ordered to clear the wood, both he and his staff officers were wounded. The photograph was taken in 1915 just before he took over his Brigade to train.

Salmon. Winchester

to the battalions is another story," he said.

The General arrived with the Brigade-Major, and the Staff Captain looked around him quickly, and afterwards turned to me.

"Have you found a good place for us?"

"Yes, sir, there's room in the signallers' dug-out, but this is a good place for seeing."

"It's close on seven o'clock. Are we through to everybody, and have the battalions reported that they are in position?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then send out the report that Brigade Headquarters has opened here. You stay with me, and be ready to take

down any orders or messages when the time comes."

With this he went to consult with the Brigade-Major. I stood on a step in the side of the trench, studying the country to the East and identifying the various features from the map. Our guns were quiet, and, although everybody within sight was moving, there was a weird stillness in the air, a brooding menace. Why was I standing here when men I knew were lined up in readiness to expose their bodies to a driving sleet of lead? The thought of the day's torment, doomed, as I thought, from its beginning to bring no recompense, weighed like a burden of iron.

#### A FURY OF SHELL FIRE

THE sound of a heavy bombardment, some distance away to our left, broke in upon the silence and grew to a storm of noise and smoke. Contalmaison was the target, prominent upon a hill until the smoke obscured the hill-top, turning it into a dark cloud hung between a blue sky and brown-pitted earth.

Out of this dark cloud, at intervals of some minutes, an orange sheet of flame made an effort to escape, only to be conquered and smudged out by the all-pervading smoke. It did not seem possible that there could be guns enough in France to create such a fury as this, and my mind went back to the artillery fire of 1916 and early 1916. Our trench bombardments were things of no importance when contrasted with this, and I felt half-ashamed to remember that they had frightened me.

AT eight o'clock the artillery began its bombardment of the edge of Mametz Wood. A thousand yards away from where I stood, our two battalions were waiting. I read the orders again. The attack was to be carried out in three stages, beginning at half-past eight, reaching in succession three positions inside the wood, under the protection of an artillery barrage. Smoke screens were to be formed here and there. Everything sounded so perfectly simple and easy.

A few minutes after eight all our telephone wires to the battalions were cut by the enemy's reply to our fire. There was no smoke screen, for some reason never explained—perhaps someone forgot about it. This was the first departure from the simplicity of the printed word. Messages came through, a steady trickle of runners bringing evil news; our fire had not masked the German machine-guns in Mametz Wood, nor in the wood near Bazentin. The elaborate time-table suddenly

became a thing of no meaning, as unrelated to our condition as one of Napoleon's orders; our artillery barrage was advancing in mockery of our failure, for we were two hundred yards away from the wood.

A message arrived from the Division. In twenty minutes' time the artillery would begin another bombardment of the edge of the wood, and under cover of this we were to renew the attack—in

twenty minutes. We were a thousand yards away from the battalions, with no telephone communication; there were maps at Divisional Headquarters; they knew where we were, they knew where the battalions were, and they knew that our lines were cut. A simple sum in arithmetic. . . . Our operation was isolated; no one was attacking on either flank of our Brigade, so that there was complete freedom of choice

as to time. With all the hours of the clock to choose from, some master-mind must needs select the only hour to be avoided. He did not ask himself whether the order could reach its ultimate destination in time . . . the answer to that sum in arithmetic.

#### THIS WAS MAMETZ OF BLOODY MEMORY

A part of the Somme battlefield, scene of the fighting described in this chapter, is shown as it is today in the lower of the two photographs in this page, and in the upper one as it was in July 1916. The land in the foreground of the lower photograph, where today the shepherd grazes his flock, was then uncultivated and covered with rank undergrowth. He is pointing approximately to the point where a shell is seen bursting on the horizon in the upper photograph. In the background in both photographs is Mametz Wood.

*Photos, Wide World and Imperial War Museum*

EVERY attempt to move near the wood was met by a burst of frontal and enfilade machine-gun fire. Shells were falling, taking a steady toll of lives. Later, another order came from Divisional Headquarters. We were to attack again, to make a third effort to penetrate this wall of lead. The General gave some orders to his Brigade-Major, called me to accompany him, and we





#### GIANT OF JULY 1st GETS TO WORK

Here is one of the guns that took part in the bombardment before the advance of July 1. It is a 9.2 gun, such as forms part of the lesser armament of men-of-war, on a special railway mounting as it is too heavy to be drawn over roads. Such a gun fires a projectile weighing 380 lb., and has a maximum range of 25,000 yards. The concussion at the moment of firing is terrific, and the man kneeling on the right, having no ear plugs, is holding his hands over his ears to save them from possible serious injury.

*Imperial War Museum*

set out for Caterpillar Wood and to reach the battalions. Although the day was fine, the heavy rains of the preceding days had turned the chalky soil into a stiff glue. The hurry in our minds accentuated the slowness of our progress, and I felt as if some physical force was dragging me back. Haste meant a fall into a shell hole, for we had abandoned the attempt to move along the trench. Shrapnel was bursting overhead, and a patter of machine-gun bullets spat through the air. We passed through Caterpillar Wood, and in a disused trench on our left I saw an artillery officer. I turned off to ask him whether his telephone was working, and learned that he was in communication with a Heavy Artillery group somewhere beyond Pommiers Redoubt. I ran down the trench to rejoin the General, and we dropped down the bank into the nullah between Caterpillar Wood and Mametz Wood, passing a stream of "walking wounded" making their way out.

There was a dug-out in the bank with scores of stretchers down on the ground in front, each stretcher occupied by a fellow creature, maimed and in pain. This was the Advance Dressing Station; twenty rounds of shrapnel would have made stretchers unnecessary. Along the bare ridge rising up to Mametz Wood our men were burrowing

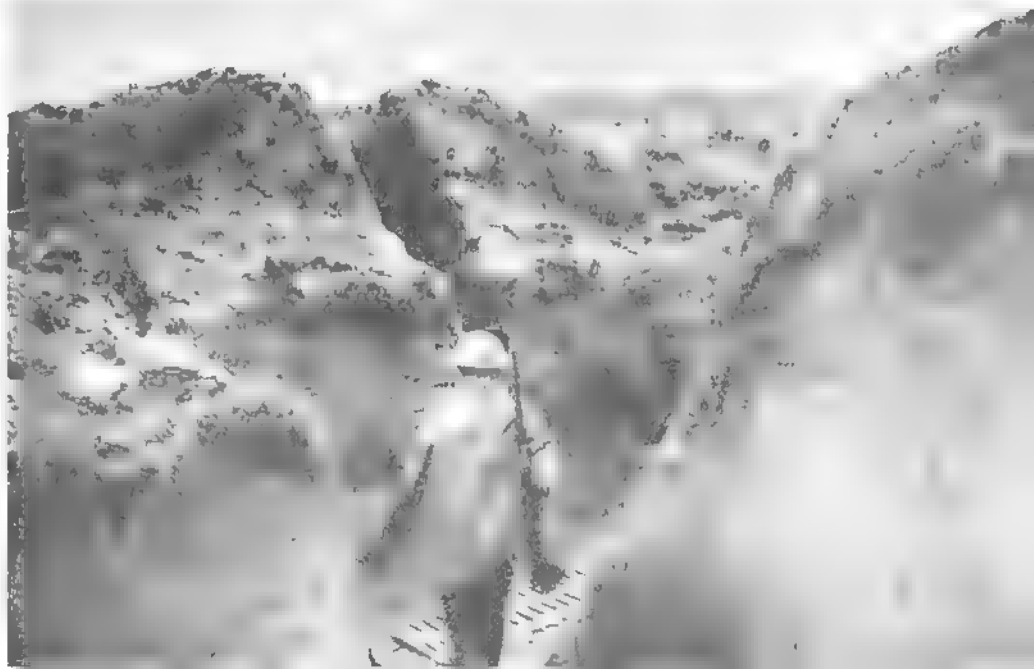
into the ground with their entrenching tools, seeking whatever cover they might make. A few shells were falling, surprisingly few. Wounded men were crawling back from the ridge, men were crawling forward with ammunition.

No attack could succeed over such ground as this, swept from front and side by machine-guns at short range. Down in the nullah we were out of sight of the enemy, but fifteen minutes of shrapnel would have reduced the brigade to a battalion, and every minute that passed seemed to bring nearer the hour of our inevitable annihilation. We were caught in a trap, unable to advance, unable to withdraw without being observed. It must ever remain one of the many mysteries of the war why the enemy

#### THIS WAS A GERMAN STRONG POINT IN 1916

One of the early successes of the British Army on July 1, 1916, was the taking of two enemy strong points, Pommiers Redoubt and Glatz Redoubt. This photograph, taken on July 7, during the attack on Mametz Wood, shows a part of Pommiers Redoubt, near to which, as mentioned on this page, was the heavy artillery. A battalion runner is returning to the line with a message from headquarters. The trench is eight to ten feet deep, and, as in wet weather the ground would be deep in mud, duckboards are laid along the whole length.

*Imperial War Museum*





did not pound us with shell fire, for this was so obviously the only place of assembly.

The time was drawing near for the renewal of the attack, for another useless slaughter. Casualties in officers had been extremely heavy, and the battalions were somewhat disorganized.

"This is sheer lunacy," said the General. "I've tried all day to stop it. We could creep up to the edge of the wood by night and rush it in the morning, but they won't listen to me. It breaks my heart to see all this."

"If I could get you through on the telephone, would you talk to them again?" I asked.

"Of course I would, but all the wires are cut, and there is no time to go back."

"I know of a telephone to an artillery group, and they might get you through to the Division," I answered.

"Find out at once whether I can get through," he replied.

I hurried up to the trench where I had seen the artillery officer and found that his wires were still uncut, and as I ran back to the General I prayed in my heart that they would hold, the lives of some hundreds of men depended upon it. It did not occur to me that words sent along that wire might fail in their object, that someone sitting far away would look at a map and say, "No, you must reach that wood at all costs." Seen in its stark reality, our position was so hopeless that a dispassionate account of it must convince any one, even at a distance of six miles, that to remain where we were would be no less calamitous than to try to advance. The enemy had shown no desire to hold that exposed ridge with men, for his bullets were defence enough, and in a short space of time his artillery must realize that there was a magnificent target in that hollow between the ridge and the bank.

When I came back to the hollow, I could not find the General. I ran from one group of men to another, working my way up the ridge, until I found him organizing the defence of the position against any possible counter-attack.

SHELLS did not seem to matter; my whole existence, up to that very minute, had been of no importance to the world, but my original conversation with that artillery officer, so obviously prompted by what men call Destiny, could lead to the saving of hundreds of lives, and must not fail to do so. I knew that I had been "chosen" for this. Ten minutes later I sat in the trench while the General spoke on the telephone, tersely describing the utter folly of any course of action other than a gradual withdrawal under cover of outposts, and quoting figures of our casualties. He was arguing with determination. There was opposition, but he won. As I jumped up to start on our way back to the ridge, he stopped me.

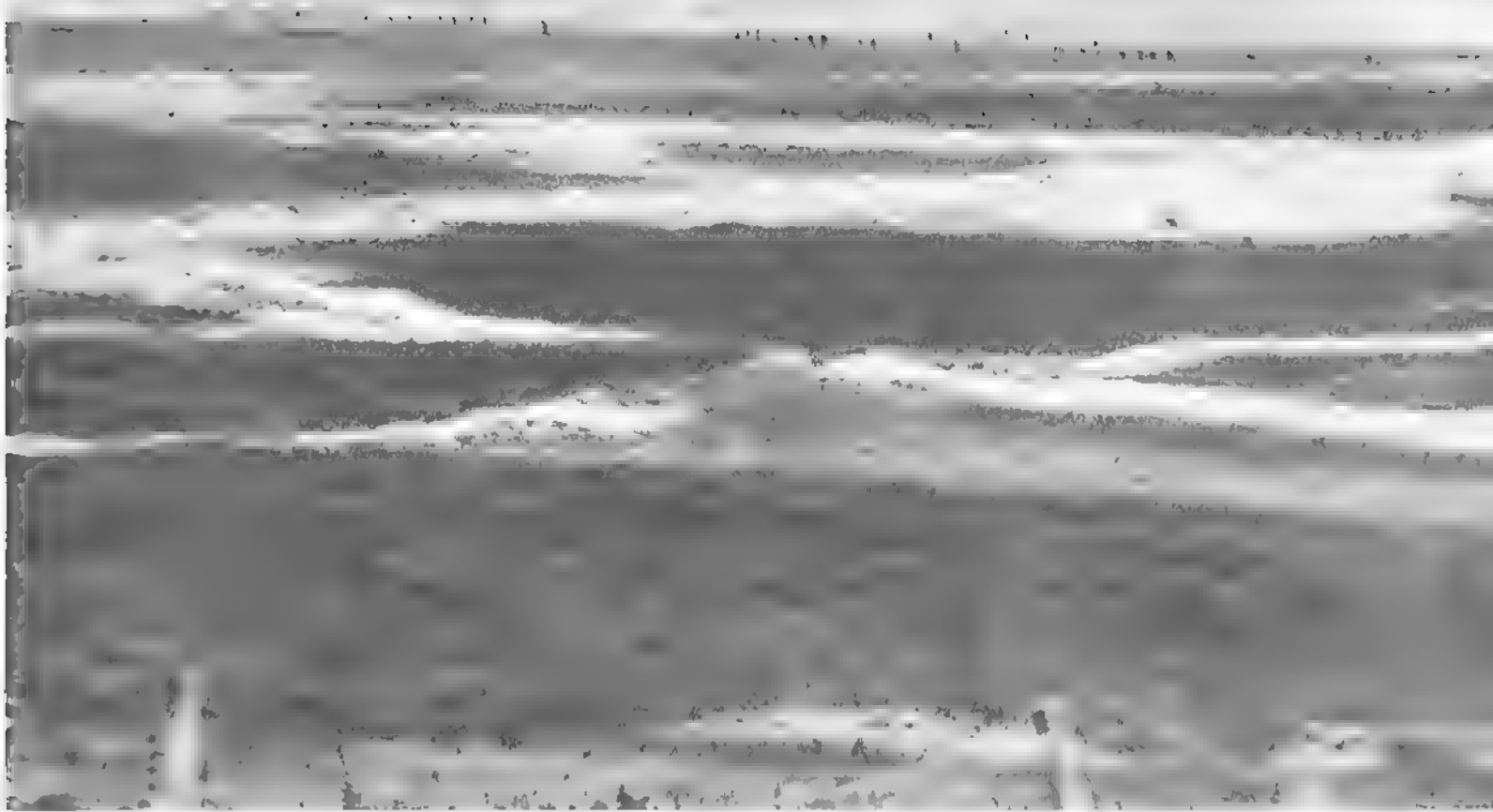
"Wait a minute. They are shelling this bank, and this message must get through. Give me a sheet of paper," said he. He wrote down his order for the withdrawal and gave it to me.

#### FIRST OF THE TERRIBLE TOLL OF THE SOMME WOUNDED

Below is a scene at an advanced dressing station on July 1, 1916, during the first few hours of the battle of Albert. Back from the front line comes convoy after convoy of ambulances, and streams of walking wounded to be dealt with where the doctors have no better accommodation for their work than the outbuildings of a farm. Many of the wounded lay out in No Man's Land for days before they could be rescued.

*Imperial War Museum*





"You go one way and I'll go another way. Join me in the hollow. Go as fast as you can."

With this he went down the trench and I ran and stumbled down the bank, still feeling perfectly safe in the hands of Destiny.

Two hours later the General and I were dragging our way from the nullah and back towards Pommiers Redoubt. We sat down in a trench to let a file of men pass by and I suddenly noticed that his face was grey and drawn.

"Have you eaten anything since this morning?" I asked him.

"No—have you?" he replied. "I feel whacked."

"Will you wait here a few minutes—I'll be back soon," I said.

I had seen a dug-out, and I went inside it. Some signallers were lighting a fire to boil a mess-tin full of water; they lent me an enamel cup, and in it I put a tablet of compressed tea. The brew was strong and the water was not boiling, but it was a warm drink, and I took it back to the General. It revived him, and we munched our biscuits as we walked along.

Back again to Pommiers Redoubt, but with a difference, in the flat grey-ness of approaching dusk. The noise of the guns had died down to a sullen

#### WHEN ZERO HOUR CAME ON THE FATEFUL DAY OF JULY 1

In this photograph British troops are advancing to attack the German positions near Mametz on July 1. The attack was made by the 15th Corps. The white streaks of chalk, for the soil hereabouts is chalky, mark the lines of trenches against which the soldiers are silhouetted. The attack was fairly successful, the right wing having advanced about 2,500 yards, and taken Mametz. The losses, however, were terribly heavy, amounting to over 8,000 of all ranks, mostly due to machine-gun fire.

*Imperial War Museum*

scale practice, and with an occasional, and almost accidental, chord, so different from the crashes of the day. Stretcher-bearers, bowed forward under their straps, were carrying their burdens of suffering across the ploughed and pitted slopes.

"How did you come to find that telephone?" asked the General.

"I happened to notice the artillery officer on my way down, and I went to ask him if his line back was working. Don't you remember my leaving you?"

"No, I don't remember. . . . Well, it saved the lives of some hundreds of men, but it has put an end to me."

"Why do you say that?"

"I spoke my mind about the whole business . . . you heard me. They wanted us to press on at all costs, talked about determination, and suggested that I didn't realize the importance of the operation. As good as told me that I was tired and didn't want to tackle the job. Difficult to judge on the spot, they said! As if the whole trouble

hadn't arisen because someone found it so easy to judge when he was six miles away and had never seen the country, and couldn't read a map.

You mark my words, they'll send me home for this; they want butchers, not brigadiers. They'll remember now that I told them, before we began, that the attack could not succeed unless the machine-guns were masked. I shall be in England in a month."

He had saved the brigade from annihilation. That the rescue, in terms of men, was no more than a respite of days was no fault of his, for there is no saving of life in war until the eleventh hour of the last day is drawing to an end.

It was nearly midnight when we heard that the last of our men had withdrawn from that ridge and valley, leaving the ground empty, save for the bodies of those who had to fall to prove to our command that machine-guns can defend a bare slope. Six weeks later the General went home.



# **'HALF-WAY HOUSE' FROM THE FIGHTING FRONT**

This spot just behind the line at the battle of the Somme known as Minden Post was familiar to thousands of soldiers, not only British but German as well. It was a half-way house where prisoners were examined, reinforcements assembled, and, in addition, a dressing station. In the top photograph a British sergeant at this point is taking papers from German prisoners and examining their identification books, which they are allowed to retain. The lower photograph gives a general view of Minden Post and its dug-outs, where reserves are concentrating. The front line trench is about 200 yards beyond the crest.

*Photos, Crown Copyright*





# I FILMED the SOMME ADVANCE

## Dauntless Courage of a Camera Man

by Lieut. G. H. Malins, O.B.E.

Official War Office Cinematographer

**THOSE** who saw the famous war film "Forgotten Men" will have a clear realization of the deadly risks taken by camera men at the front. Mr. Malins, who was officially accredited to the War Office, here relates his thrilling experiences when filming the opening battles of the Somme, an exploit as truly courageous as any told by the fighting men. The units which Mr. Malins "shot" were in the famous 29th Division

shrapnel, and might have enfiladed the whole road from either flank.

I filmed the waiting Fusiliers. Some of them looked happy and gay, others sat with stern, set faces, realizing the great task in front of them.

I had finished taking my scenes, and asked an officer if the Colonel was there.

"No, but you may find him in 'White City.' He was there about an hour ago. Great heavens," he said, "who would have believed that a 'movie-man' would be here, the nearest point to Boche lines on the whole front. You must like your job. Hanged if I envy you. Anyway, hope to see you after the show, if I haven't 'gone West.' Cheerio," and with that he left me.

Packing up my camera, I prepared to return. Time was getting on. It was now 6.30 a.m. The attack was timed for 7.20. As I wanted to obtain some scenes of our men taking up their final positions, I told my guide to start.

"Duck as low as possible," I said, "when you cross the road."

"We can't go yet, sir; munitions are being brought through, and, as you know, there isn't room to pass one another."

I WAITED until the last man had come in from the sap, then, practically on hands and knees, made for the sap mouth.

"Cheer up, boys," I shouted to the men as I parted from them, "best of luck; hope to see you in the village."

"Hope so, sir," came a general chorus in reply.

Again I struggled through the narrow slit, then down the shaft and finally into the tunnel. We groped our way along as best we could. The place was full of men. It was only possible to get my tripod and camera along by passing it from one to another. Then as the men stooped low I stepped

over them, eventually reaching the other end—and daylight.

The "strafe" was still on, but not quite so violent. Our parapets were in a sorry condition, battered out of all shape.

RETURNING through King Street, I was just in time to film some of the men fixing bayonets before being sent to their respective stations in the firing trench. The great moment was drawing near. I admit I was feeling a wee bit nervous. The mental and nervous excitement under such conditions was very great. Every one was in a state of suppressed excitement. On the way I passed an officer I knew.

"Are you going over?" I said.

"Rather," he replied; "the whole lot of us. Some stunt, eh!"

"Don't forget," I said, "the camera will be on you; good luck!"

Bidding my man collect the tripod and camera, I made for the position on Jacob's Ladder. But I was to receive a rude shock. The shelling of the morning had practically blown it all down. But there was sufficient for a clearance all around for my purpose, and sufficient shelter against stray bits of shrapnel. I prepared to put up my camera. Not quite satisfied, I left it about thirty yards away, to view the situation quickly, as there were only twenty minutes to go.

Hardly had I left the machine than a whizz-bang fell and struck the parapet immediately above the ladder, tumbling the whole lot of sandbags down like a pack of cards.

It was a lucky escape for me. The position was absolutely no use now, and I had to choose another. Time was short. I hastily fixed my camera on the side of the small bank, this side of our firing trench, with my lens pointing towards the Hawthorn Redoubt, where the mine—the largest "blown"



**ARMED WITH A CAMERA**

Lieutenant Geoffrey H. Malins had made films of troops under training in the British Isles before he went to Belgium. For his services at the Front he was made an officer of the Order of the British Empire. Here he is seen with his cinema camera equipment.

**THE** end of the sap came in sight.

My guide was crouching there, and in front of him, about thirty feet away, running at right angles on both sides, was a roadway, overgrown with grass and pitted with shell-holes. The bank immediately in front was lined with stumps of trees and a rough hedge, and there lined up, crouching as close to the bank as possible, were some of our men. They were the Lancashire Fusiliers, with bayonets fixed, and ready to spring forward.

"Keep low as you run across the road, sir. The Boche can see right along it; make straight for the other side." With that he ran across, and I followed. Then I set my camera up and filmed the scene. I had to take every precaution in getting my machine in position, keeping it close to the bank, as a false step would have exposed the position to the Boche, who would have immediately turned on H.E.



### THIS WAS A TWENTY-TON MINE

On July 1, 1916, an enormous mine, charged with twenty tons of ammonal, was sprung under the German position, known as the Hawthorn Redoubt, near Beaumont-Hamel. When it was due to be "blown," Mr. Malins was ready with his camera and filmed the immense upheaval from start to finish. This still photograph, made at the same time as his historic film, shows the great smoke cloud after the mine had done its awful work.

*Imperial War Museum*

on the British Front—was going up. It was loaded with 20 tons of a new explosive of tremendous destructive power, and it had taken seven months to build.

Gee, what an awakening for Boche!

My camera was now set ready to start exposing. I looked along the trench. The men were ready and waiting the great moment.

ONE little group was discussing the prospects of a race across No Man's Land.

"Bet you, Jim, I'll get there first."

"Right-o! How much?"

"A day's pay," was the reply.

"Take me on too, will you?" said another hero.

"Yes. Same terms, eh? Good enough."

"Say, Bill," he called to his pal, "pay up from my cash if I 'go West.'"

"Shut up, fathead; we have to kill Huns, 'strafe' them."

I turned away to speak to an officer as to the prospects.

"Very good," he said. "I hope they don't plaster our trenches before all the men get out. They are as keen as mustard. Never known them so bright. Look at them now; all smoking."

Our guns were still pounding heavily, and the din and concussion was awful. To hear oneself speak it was absolutely necessary to shout.

"You are in a pretty rocky position," someone said to me. "Fritz will be sure to plaster this front pretty well as soon as our men 'get over.'"

"Can't help it," I said; "my machine must have a clear view. I must take the risk. How's the time going?"

"It's 'seven-ten' now," he said.

"I am going to stand by. Cheerio; best of luck!"

I left him and stood by my machine. The minutes dragged on. Still the guns crashed out. The German fire had died down a bit during the last half-hour. I glanced down our trenches. The officers were giving final instruc-

tions. Every man was in his place. The first to go over would be the engineers, to wire the crater. They were all ready, crouching down, with their implements in their hands.

Time: 7.15 a.m.!

Heavens, how the minutes dragged. It seemed like a lifetime waiting there. My nerves were strung up to a high pitch; my heart was thumping like a steam-hammer. I gave a quick glance at an officer close by. He was mopping the perspiration from his brow, and clutching his stick, first in one hand, then in the other—quite unconsciously, I am sure. He looked at his watch. Another three minutes went by.

### SUPREME SUSPENSE

WOULD nothing ever happen?

Time: 7.19 a.m. My hand grasped the handle of the camera. I set my teeth. My whole mind was concentrated upon my work. Another thirty seconds passed. I started turning the handle, two revolutions per second, no more, no less. I noticed how regularly I was turning. (My object in exposing half a minute beforehand was to get the mine from the moment it broke ground.) I fixed my eyes on the Redoubt. Any second now. Surely it was time. It seemed to me as if I had been turning for hours. Great heavens! Surely it had not misfired.

Why doesn't it go up?

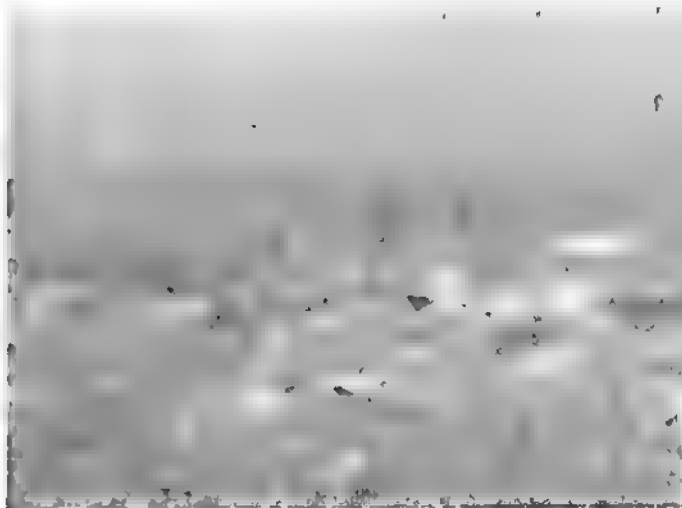
I looked at my exposure dial. I had used over a thousand feet. The horrible thought flashed through my mind, that my film might run out before the mine blew. Would it go up before I had time to reload? The thought brought beads of perspiration to my forehead. The agony was awful; indescribable. My hand began to shake. Another 250 feet exposed. I had to keep on.

Then it happened.

The ground where I stood gave a mighty convulsion. It rocked and swayed. I gripped hold of my tripod to steady myself. Then, for all the world like a gigantic sponge, the earth rose in the air to the height of hundreds of feet.

Higher and higher it rose, and with a horrible, grinding roar the earth fell back upon itself, leaving in its place a mountain of smoke.

From the moment the mine went up my feelings changed. The crisis was over, and from that second I was cold, cool, and calculating. I looked upon all that followed from the purely pictorial point of view, and even felt annoyed if a shell burst outside the range of my camera. Why couldn't Boche put that shell a little nearer? It would make a better picture. And so my thoughts ran on.



### **THE GALLANT TWENTY-NINTH— 'SPEARHEAD' ON THE SOMME**

The 29th Division, which first won fame at the Gallipoli landing, has been described as one of the "spearhead" divisions of the British Army. It was heavily engaged on the first day of the battle of Albert, and above one of the battalions composing it is seen advancing, at 7.45 a.m., for the assault on Beaumont-Hamel. After reaching the crater on Hawthorn Ridge, which can be seen in the centre of the horizon, with heavy loss, it was forced to retire. The men of the 29th Division who fell in the neighbourhood are commemorated by the stone cairn (right) in the Newfoundland Park at Beaumont-Hamel, which bears a reproduction of the divisional badge. Below is Beaumont-Hamel village as it is today.

*Photos Imperial War Museum; Hallaert; and (bottom) W. A. Davis copyright A.P. Ltd*







#### THE TRENCH WAS HIS STUDIO

Armed only with his cinematograph camera, the author of this chapter is seen here located in a trench busily filming the preliminary bombardment which marked the opening of the Somme offensive on July 1, 1916. Onto the tripod a sandbag has been attached to camouflage the camera. Shortly after this photograph had been taken Malins was half-buried by debris scattered by a bursting shell.

*From 'How I Filmed the War,' courtesy of Herbert Jenkins, Ltd.*

The earth was down. I swung my camera round on to our own parapets. The engineers were swarming over the top and streaming along the sky-line. Our guns redoubled their fire. The Germans then started H.E. Shrapnel began falling in the midst of our advancing men. I continued to turn the handle of my camera, viewing the whole attack through my view-finder, first swinging one way and then the other.

Then another signal rang out, and from the trenches immediately in front of me our wonderful troops went over

the top. What a picture it was! They went over as one man. I could see while I was exposing that numbers were shot down before they reached the top of the parapet; others just the other side. They went across the ground in swarms, and, marvel upon marvels, still smoking cigarettes. One man actually stopped in the middle of No Man's Land to light up again.

The Germans had by now realized that the great attack had come. Shrapnel poured into our trenches with the object of keeping our supports from coming up. They had even got

their "crumps" and high-explosive shrapnel into the middle of our boys before they were half-way across No Man's Land. But still they kept on. At that moment my spool ran out. I hurriedly loaded up again, and, putting the first priceless spool in my case, I gave it to my man in a dug-out to take care of, impressing upon him that he must not leave it under any circumstances. If anything unforeseen happened he was to take it back to Headquarters.

I RUSHED back to my machine again.

Shells were exploding quite close to me. At least I was told so afterwards by an officer. But I was so occupied with my work that I was quite unconscious of their proximity. I began filming once more. The first lot of men, or rather the remainder of them, had disappeared in the haze and smoke, punctured by bursting shells. What was happening in the German lines I did not know. Other men were coming up and going over the top.

The German machine-gun fire was not quite so deadly now, but our men suffered badly from shell-fire. On several occasions I noticed men run and take temporary cover in the shell holes, but their ranks were being terribly thinned.

Still more went over, and still a stream of men were making for the mine crater; they then disappeared in the smoke.

The noise was terrific. It was as if the earth were lifting bodily and crashing against some immovable object. The very heavens seemed to be falling. Thousands of things were happening at the same moment. The mind could not begin to grasp the barest margin of it.

The German shells were crashing all round me. Dirt was being flung in my face, cutting it like whipcord. My only thought was whether any of it had struck my lens and made it dirty, for this would have spoiled my film. I gave a quick glance at it. It was quite all right.

Fearful fighting was taking place in the German trenches. The heavy rattle of machine-guns, the terrible din of exploding bombs, could be heard above the pandemonium. Our men had ceased to flow from the trenches. I crept to the top of the parapet, and looked towards the left of the village of Beaumont-Hamel. Our guns were bursting on the other side of the village, but I could distinguish nothing else as to how things were going.

I asked an officer who was standing close by.

"God knows," he replied. "Everything over there is so mixed up. The General said this was the hardest part of the line to get through, and, my word, it seems like it, to look at our poor lads."

I could see them strewn all over the ground, swept down by the accursed machine-gun fire.

A quick succession of shell-bursts attracted my attention. Back to my camera position. Another lot of our men were going over the top. I began exposing, keeping them in my camera view all the time, as they were crossing, by revolving my tripod head.

Shell after shell crashed in the middle of them, leaving ghastly gaps, but other men quickly filled them up, passing through the smoke, and over the bodies of their comrades, as if there were no such thing as a shell in all the world. Another spool ran out, making the fourth since the attack started. I gave it in charge of my man, with the same instructions as before. I loaded again, and had just started exposing. Something attracted my attention on the extreme left. What it was I don't

know. I ceased turning, but still holding the handle I veered the front of my camera round.

The next moment, with a shriek and a flash, a shell fell and exploded before I had time to take shelter. It was only a few feet away. What happened after I hardly knew. There was the grinding crash of a bursting shell; something struck my tripod, the whole thing, camera and all, was flung against me.

I CLUTCHED it and staggered back, holding it in my arms. I dragged it into a shrapnel-proof shelter, sat down and looked for the damage. A piece of the shell had struck the tripod and cut the legs clean in half, on one side, carrying about six inches of it away. The camera, thank heaven, was untouched.

Calling my man, we hastily found some pieces of wood, old telephone wire and string, and within an hour had improvised legs, rigid enough to continue taking scenes.

I again set up my camera. Our gunfire was still terrible, but the Germans had shortened their range and were evidently putting a barrage on our men,

who had presumably reached the enemy's front trenches. Nobody knew anything definitely. Wounded men began to arrive. There was a rush for news.

"How are things going?" we asked.

"We have taken their first and second lines," said one.

An officer passed on a stretcher.

"How are things going?"

"God knows," he said. "I believe we have got through their first line and part of the village, but don't know whether we shall be able to hold out; we have been thinned shockingly."

"Have you been successful?" he asked me.

"Yes, I've got the whole of the attack."

"Good man," he said.

FIRST one rumour then another came through. There was nothing definite. The fighting over there was furious. I filmed various scenes of our wounded coming in over the parapet; then through the trenches. Lines of them were awaiting attention.

Scenes crowded upon me. Wounded and more wounded; men who a few hours before had leaped over the parapet full of life and vigour were now dribbling back. Some of them shattered and broken for life. But it was one of the most glorious charges ever made in the history of the world. These men had done their bit.

#### HE WAS FILMING THE REAL THING

Though a non-combatant, Mr. Malins, as official war cinematographer, shared many of the dangers and hardships of the fighting men, whose exploits in several parts of the line he faithfully recorded by means of his camera. This photograph, taken in 1916, shows him in a shell hole in No Man's Land taking pictures of shells bursting on the German trenches. How he filmed the British attack on the first day of the Somme offensive is vividly told in this chapter.

*From 'How I Filmed the War,' courtesy of Herbert Jenkins, Ltd.*



# 'FIT ONLY for DEVILS to LIVE'

## I Saw Tragedy on a July Dawn

by Yeoman Warder A. H. Cook



**SERGEANT THEN**

Yeoman Warder Cook served throughout the war, and at a later date than this action, for his part in which he received the personal congratulations of the Divisional Commander, he was awarded the D.C.M. and the M.M.

ON June 28 we were told that owing to heavy rains the great attack had been delayed until July 1. The 11th Brigade were to attack on a three battalion frontage. The front line was to consist of the 1st East Lancashire, 1st Rifle Brigade and the 8th Royal Warwicks; while in the second or support line were the 1st Hampshires, 1st Somersets and the 6th Royal Warwicks. The 6th and 8th Royal Warwicks from the 48th Division were attached to the 11th Brigade for this attack.

The bombardment was very intense all through the night of June 28 and during the following day. Zero hour was fixed for 7.30 a.m., July 1. All private correspondence and kit, together with cap badge and numerals were to be left behind. (I never saw these again.) Everyone was fitted with the necessities for action, such as food, extra ammunition, grenades, etc.

THE men were in excellent spirits and full of hopes. It was such a change to realize after so many months in the trenches and taking everything coming our way, without a chance of hitting back, that tomorrow would give us our chance of revenge for many lost pals. We paraded at 9.45 p.m. and marched to the assembly trenches, which were reached about midnight. We were then ordered to put our ladders and bridges into position, and try to get a couple of hours' rest.

July 1 broke a lovely morning and the birds were singing. Breakfast was at 5.30 a.m., the men being issued with patent cookers for the occasion. The

bombardment was now terrific, the German lines were one cloud of smoke, that it seemed to be impossible for anyone to live in such a hell. It was a wonderful sight. We actually stood on our parapets to get a better view, not a sign of life could we see and still no response from the enemy. We applauded direct hits and rubbed our hands in glee. We were all looking forward to 7.30; it looked a cake-walk.

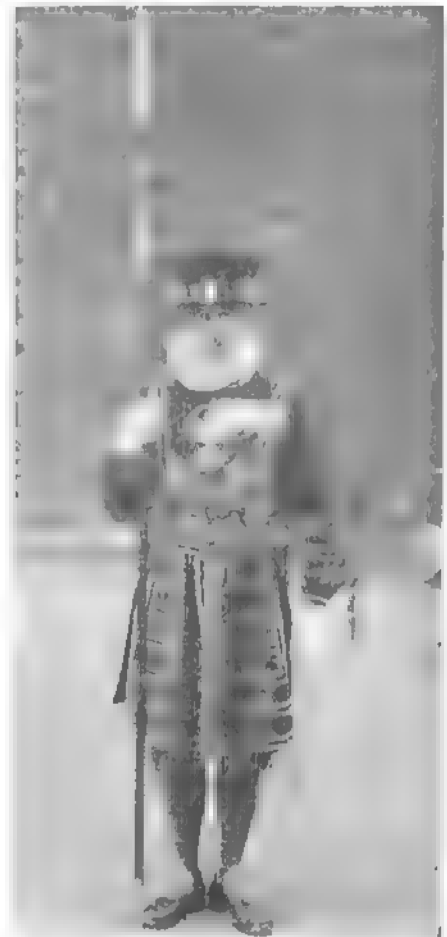
At 7.20 a.m. a huge mine was exploded under the Hawthorn Redoubt just on our right front, it made our trenches rock.

Punctually at 7.30 a.m. the attack was launched, the 1st Rifle Brigade advanced to our front in perfect skirmishing order, and the same applied to all troops, left and right, as far as the eye could see. Everything was working smoothly, not a shot being fired. We were supposed to follow up the R.B.s at 7.40, but we were so anxious to get on with it, that we were at once out of our trenches on our way after the Rifles.

THE first line had nearly reached the German front line, when all at once machine-guns opened up all along our front with a murderous fire, and we were caught in the open, with no shelter; fire was directed on us from both flanks, men were falling like ninepins, my platoon officer fell (2nd-Lt. Tilley), he was wounded and captured. My platoon sergeant was killed, which left me in charge of the platoon, this within five minutes of our advance.

We had to swing slightly to our left, as to approach our objective direct was impossible, it meant going over some high ground which was being enfiladed by M.G. fire. I led the platoon on to the German first line, and after a breather, went on to the second line. Here I lost control, the men were rushing here and there, from one shell hole to another, in their advance. The ground was covered with our dead, enfilade fire from the right played havoc with us all.

Our guns had made an unholy mess of the German trenches, but very few dead could be seen, owing to the fact they were safely stowed away in their dug-outs. Scarcely a square foot of ground had been left undisturbed, everything was churned up, there were huge gaps in the wire entanglements, but the dug-outs were all practically



**YEOMAN WARDER NOW**

The photograph above shows the writer of this chapter as he is today in the full-dress uniform of a Yeoman Warder of the Tower. The Yeoman Warders, though wearing a similar uniform, are a separate corps from the Yeomen of the Guard.





*Photo, W. A. Davis, copyright A. P. Ltd.*

#### **ALBERT'S 'LEANING VIRGIN' ERECT ONCE MORE**

The town of Albert was completely destroyed by continuous bombardment during the war, but one of the last buildings to go was the tower of the Byzantine church of Notre Dame des Brebières. It was surmounted by an effigy of the Virgin and Child, which was struck by a shell in June 1915 and bent down to an angle of 15 degrees below horizontal. There was a superstition among some of the soldiers that when the effigy fell the war would end, but it was brought to earth in March 1918. The church is seen above restored as it is today.



**FAR FROM DOWN-HEARTED—**

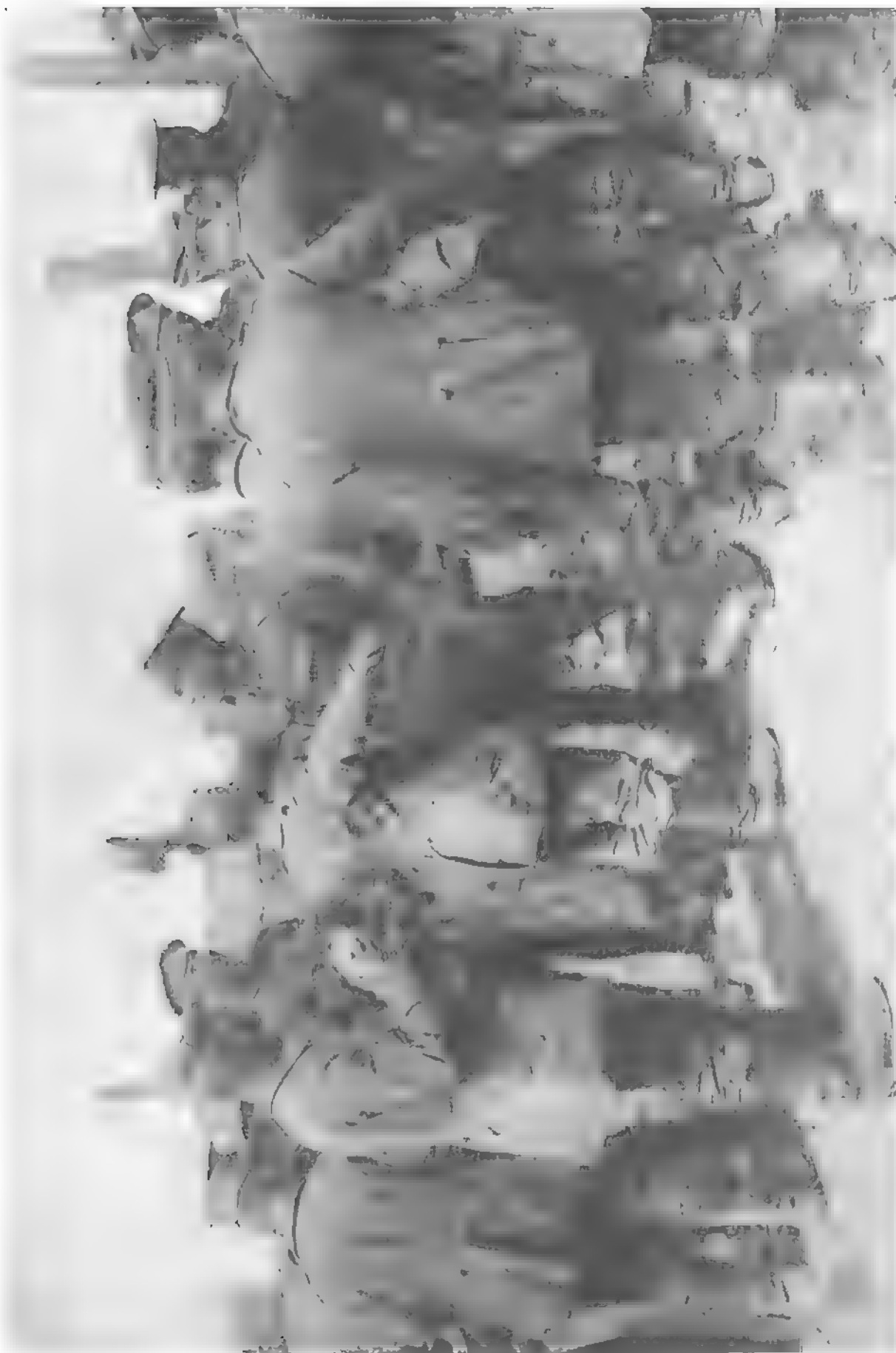
The fine spirit of the troops of the British Expeditionary Force is shown as convincingly in this photograph as it is in those of the "Fighting Fifth" after St. Eloi in pages 582 and 596. These men of the 13th Royal Fusiliers have been over the top, they have dared death every moment of the day and have seen their comrades fall dead and wounded around them, yet they face the camera with a spirit as cheerful as if they had just seen the home team win a cup-tie instead of going through the most terrible ordeal a soldier can face.



**—AND VERY MUCH AT EASE**

*Imperial War Museum*

This remarkably vivid photograph was taken near Albert on the Albert-Bapaume Road after the fighting near La Boisselle on July 7, 1916. Many of these men have discarded their steel helmets, some for easier headgear and some for German helmets, while others have dispensed with part of their uniforms and their boots and socks. In the background can be seen the ever-welcome field kitchens preparing a meal. In the left foreground are some soldiers from the French Army which was fighting on the right of the 13th Corps.



#### FRUITS OF THE FIRST DAY'S FIGHTING

In the battle of the Somme, which opened on July 1, 1916, both sides took many prisoners. These Germans, bedraggled, weary and shaken after the fierce confusion of the first day's fighting, have reached a prison compound, where they are being searched. Dejected in the first hours of captivity, they afterwards grew contented with their lot, for surrender meant survival, while the war with all its horror continued for two more years. Prisoners' property was sent for expert examination by Intelligence officers.

*Imperial War Museum*



safe. These were a revelation to us, being most elaborately made, and down about thirty feet.

Mopping-up parties were not clearing the trenches properly, as Jerry was popping up all over the place, behind and on our flanks and throwing grenades at us from all angles. A lot were seen to throw their hand in and were scattering back to our lines, but the majofity were mown down by their own guns. It was impossible to get any further without help. Rumour said that some had reached their objectives and were now cut off. Dead and dying were lying everywhere, there was a man just in front of us sitting on a mound shouting for help, he was covered with blood from head to foot.

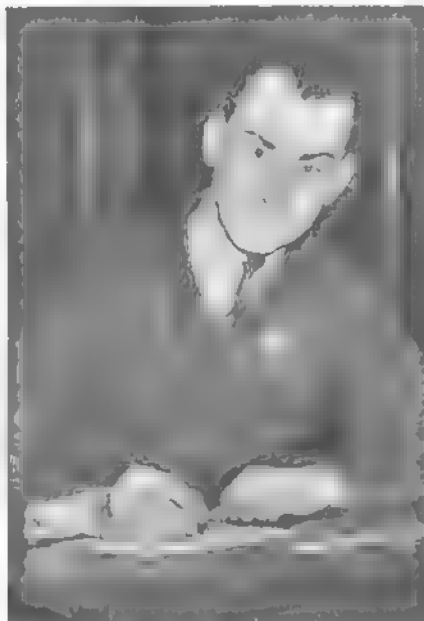
#### IT WAS A CIRCLE OF DEATH

THIS was a peculiar position here, the ground in front was circular in shape, or nearly so, it must have been the "Quadrilateral," as it was defended on all sides and about the size of Piccadilly Circus. Communication trenches were everywhere, and just in front was a communication trench up which some British troops were moving. This seemed quite in order until I noticed some Germans with fixed bayonets, and then realized that our fellows were prisoners, so I started picking off the escorts; this was very successful, and quite good fun being able to hit back, although I seemed to be the only one chancing my head over the top. Our men could have escaped, but I suppose they were fed up with it all, and only too glad to be out of the fighting. The troops were very discouraged at being held up. The 10th and 12th Brigades reinforced us, but they were met by a withering fire and practically annihilated. Their wounded were everywhere, and the dead were heaped on top of each other, where the machine-guns caught them. Our only hope was to consolidate our meagre gains.

COLONEL HOPKINS of the Seaforths was doing excellent work, he seemed to be the only officer here, and was seen walking around the Quadrilateral giving encouragement to all. He saved a dangerous situation; someone gave the order to retire, there was an immediate panic, and some four or five hundred retired, in spite of great efforts to stem the rush by the colonel and us sergeants present. The colonel then ordered a bugler of the Seaforths to sound the "charge"; this had the immediate effect and saved the situation. (This bugler, Ritchie, was awarded the V.C. for this action.)

There were many casualties amongst those that retired. I have never seen

during nearly two years of this war so many dead in such a small area. In places where enfilade fire caught them they were three to four deep, and they all looked to be asleep except for their painful expressions. As all the casualties were from machine-gun fire, the bodies were whole, and not blown to bits by shell fire. Shells would probably fall amongst them later and dismember them, but they would not be conscious of any more pain. The shell holes were



#### WON THE V.C. WITH HIS BUGLE

In the terrible action described in this page, Drummer Ritchie, 2nd Seaforth Highlanders, rallied his comrades repeatedly by sounding the "charge," though he stood amid intense machine-gun fire. For this deed he was given the V.C. Now an officer of a Glasgow school, Ritchie is seen here as he is today and, in the upper photograph, taken at a reception held in his honour, as he was in 1916.

full of the wounded, and there was no hope of getting them back till darkness sets in.

It is extraordinary how some men die. I slipped into a shell hole and on getting out saw a man sitting up apparently doing his puttee up. I entered into conversation and was getting annoyed at no reply; he was dead.

The Germans were now trying to force us out of their trenches. We got together what was left of us, and started collecting bombs from the dead and wounded, and then commenced a grenade battle in real earnest; but after two or three hours our supply of bombs ran out, and there were no more to be got. The Germans then gradually drove us back inch by inch, through their superior supply of bombs. Again someone gave the order to "retire," and again men started to retire, but we



stopped this, as every man was wanted in the trench.

Our numbers were very small and men were being killed and wounded in all directions, it was difficult to walk in the trench without walking on the dead.

The sight of some of the dead was ghastly. You might be talking to a man one minute, the next minute he was dead at your feet, and as shells were now falling amongst us, both British and German, he was soon blown to pieces. We all saw a similar fate in store for us, it seemed impossible to get out of this mess alive, and we said to ourselves if our time was coming, let it be soon, as life here was more fit for devils than human beings.

I had a terrible thirst caused by all the fumes of bursting bombs and shells, the wounded were crying out for water, and the bottles of the dead had been drained by them. I cannot truthfully describe life here amongst the living wounded and the dead! You could not move without walking on them, and no attempt was made to avoid them. I could see very few of the Somersets here.

OUR troops were gradually retiring and only leaving a small garrison to hold the trench. It was very dangerous to move about, but bombs had to be got, so I went round and collected as many as I could find on the casualties; these were soon used up, and now we had to retire to the former German front line, and try to hold out with the rifle and machine-guns; but it was bombs we wanted, as Jerry took advantage of the maze of communication trenches to follow up every yard we gave. Our



**THEY FACED DEATH  
IN DEFENCE  
AND ATTACK**

Above, a winning party of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment is going up to the trenches at Beaumont-Hamel in July 1916, their duty being to repair the barbed wire entanglements in front of the trenches, a task that courted death. The first man is carrying wire-pickets, posts with giant corkscrews at one end, which were screwed into the ground to support the wire. Right is a scene at Beaumont-Hamel on July 1. Men of the Warwickshire Regiment are advancing up a captured communication trench to relieve the West Surreys.

*Imperial War Museum*





#### THE HORSES STILL HELD THEIR OWN

The busy scene that a transport camp presented at all times, but especially when a big battle was in progress, can be realized from this photograph. It shows the transport lines at Maillv-Maillet, about two miles west of Beaumont-Hamel, in July 1916. In the foreground ammunition wagons and limbers are parked and horses are being taken off to water; while in the background the cooks are at work with their field kitchens. Though mechanized transport greatly increased as the war went on, the wagons that fed the guns near the front were generally horse-drawn.

*Imperial War Museum*

numbers were reduced to about fifty at this time. I did not know where the others were, they must all have retired. A Second-Lieut. of the Warwicks and I had a little pow-wow on the situation and decided to split the men we had equally between us and barricade the trench left and right and leave the open space between to look after itself, so he went to the right and I to the left, until we gained contact with the enemy, then we made our barricade.

I THEN got a few men to collect all bombs. A German commenced to approach us—I sniped him; but many others were following with bombs, and these now commenced another grenade contest, and the only bombs we had were the German stick bombs. We could see each other as the bombs were thrown, and we were actually throwing back the bombs they threw before they burst. The time fuse seemed much longer than our Mills bomb of four seconds.

My numbers were becoming rapidly reduced, but we were holding our own until the enemy worked around to our right rear and began bombing us from this quarter. This was getting pretty hot, but my orders were to hang on till midnight, when we were to be relieved, but we seemed to be the only British troops here, and my party now numbered nine. I had not seen any Somersets for hours. I thought I could hold these people while the bombs lasted. The trenches were full of German dead which we bombed out in the morning,

and we had to keep clambering backwards and forwards in our efforts to hold our own. Shells were now falling thick and fast, the enemy had apparently retired and asked for artillery support to try to dislodge us.

We were relieved about 11 p.m. and ordered to go back. We needed no second telling, for what was left of us had had a bellyful of war for one day. I saw the first Somerset for hours, Sergeant Imber at the end of a German sap. I said, "Come on Sam, we are relieved." Sam had about six German helmets hung on him. We started off and Jerry dropped a barrage on No Man's Land, and what with the blinding flash of shells, barbed wire and shell holes, we soon lost each other.

The night got blacker and blacker after each blinding flash.

How I escaped I do not know. I tripped over dead bodies, fell headlong into shell holes full of dead, my clothes were torn to ribbons by barbed wire. I lost sense of direction and eventually fell sprawling, dead beat to the world.

As soon as I recovered I saw a form standing over me with a fixed bayonet. He thought I was a German, and I

thought he was; but thank God it was a British sentry. He had received orders that no British troops were in front, so I nearly got shot by our own men after being out there since 7.30 a.m. What a lot had happened since then. I had gone over the top happy and cheerful with thousands of others, and here was I tumbling back into our trenches alone, a second Dr. Bryden of Jelalabad fame.

OUR trenches were in an awful state.

Dead and dying were everywhere. I wandered about, trying to find out where I was and where the Battalion was. Eventually I found Sergeant (Tommy) Johnson and a few Somersets, and information that our brigade had gone into Divisional Reserve at Maillv-Maillet, which we reached at 3.30 a.m. absolutely beat to the world.

We were roused at 7 a.m. for roll call. No officer who went into action (there were 26) was present, 17 were killed, 1 captured and 8 wounded. All Warrant Officers were killed, 7 Sergeants survived, I was fortunately one of these, 438 other ranks were killed, wounded and missing. Heavy as these casualties were, I believe those of other units of the 4th Division were even heavier.

# The COST of a FEW CRATERS

## What a Frenchman Saw at La Boisselle

by Paul Maze, D.C.M., M.M., Croix de Guerre

**THE** author, who in Chapter 26 gave a most thrilling account of his experiences during the retreat from Mons, here recounts the adventures which befell him during the first days of the battle of the Somme, when he watched the taking of a few craters at great cost of life. M. Maze was a Frenchman attached to the staff of General Sir Hubert Gough, and acted as his observer in forward areas, and with the greatest intrepidity visited the front line on the eve of an attack, made sketches, and brought back to his general a first-hand account of the progress of an attack



**GOUGH'S OBSERVER**

M. Paul Maze is in the British uniform that he wore while attached to General Gough's staff, an officer's uniform without a Sam Browne belt or rank badges. A photograph of M. Maze as he is today appears in page 108.

*Imperial War Museum*

it was already very hot. Waiting outside in the château grounds I could see into the signal office, where hands were busy at switchboards. Staff motors, flying every description of little flags, were constantly arriving and departing, adding to the dust that rose into a thick veil on the main road.

**A**MBULANCES had already started rolling by with their first loads of wounded. The noise of guns was alarming. The windows of the headquarters rattled from some heavy guns hidden in the park, firing off their big shells. The French, attacking simultaneously with us on the right, were contributing to the uproar

The first news received from the line was marked with success and filled us all with hopeful expectations; the right divisions had passed their first objectives and were going on. However, it was not so definite about the left; conflicting reports were coming in; the situation there did not seem so clear.

Formations of aeroplanes, continuously passing overhead to and from the line, were adding to the excitement by exchanging signals with tracer bullets. At the same time the yellow nose of an observation balloon was looming in sight, tossing awkwardly over the tops of houses as it gathered height, pulling on its tight cable anchoring it to the ground. The light breeze was making

**I** WAS awakened by a hurricane bombardment, shaking everything; already the divisions had gone over; daylight was just entering my room. Sudden detonations in the sky diverted my attention from the uproar coming from the line. I looked out of the window and saw, high up above, a tiny speck racing and buzzing through the air, evading our shrapnel burst, which, after flashing, broke into yellowish balls of smoke. I went on with my dressing when the sudden quick rattle of machine-guns made me look out again; there the space of limpid blue was divided as by a plummet-line by a vertical spiral black smoke which the fall of a plane in flames had left in its wake. The anti-aircraft guns had ceased firing—up above all was peaceful again—the smoke from the shrapnel was expanding into long filaments which floated across the sky.

The Reserve Army and three divisions were waiting to exploit the breach which the 4th Army had to make. As General Gough was going to the 4th Army Headquarters in Querrieu to keep in close touch with operations, he told me to follow on, as he might need me with my motor-bike. Though still very early,



**HEADQUARTERS FOR THE SOMME**

During the battle of the Somme this quiet country house was the scene of intense activity, for it was the headquarters of the Fourth Army under the command of General Sir Henry Rawlinson. It is the Château de Querrieu, standing about 7½ miles along the road from Amiens to Albert. It is seen as it is today, unscathed by war and once more a peaceful home.

*A. J. Inall, copyright A.P. Ltd.*



ripples on the big envelope, now reducing its size as it rose towards the blue sky, the gondola swinging about as the observer inside reeled out his aerial and looked at the ground receding under him.

Great tension was reigning in the office. I didn't envy the Generals their responsibilities as they pored over maps and messages, and faced at every moment the taking of grave decisions.

At noon we knew that in front of Thiepval and Beaumont-Hamel we had been severely checked. Of that, there was no more doubt—the attacks on the whole of the left front had failed. The casualties were very serious. The Reserve Army stood awaiting further developments.

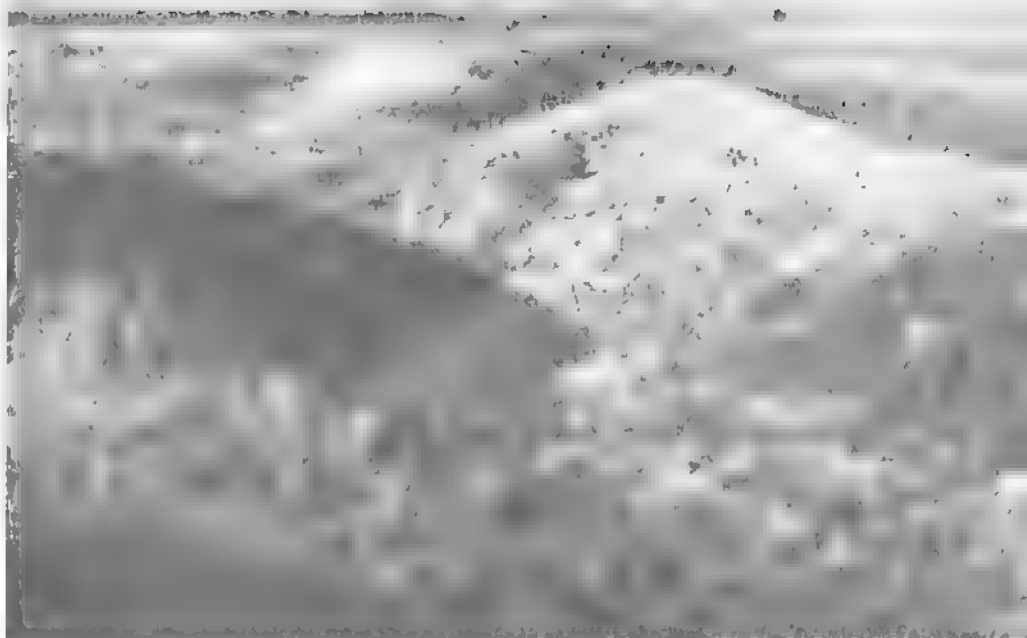
I WENT at night to Albert, where I knew that from some high ground I could look into La Boisselle and a wide stretch of the battle-ground. The line kept emerging from the darkness, illuminated by brilliant lights from a constant succession of soaring rockets, bursting and spreading into vivid colours, momentarily revealing quivering patches of the deep shade beyond.

Our men were then bombing the craters in front of La Boisselle. Occasionally the light showed up little figures crawling over broken ground. Behind me the town of Albert was trembling with the shelling, as flashes from the guns played hide-and-seek through the beams of its gaping roofs and intermittently lit up as in daylight a white streak of the Albert-Bapaume road. A batch of dejected prisoners was being shepherded to a cage near by, where their comrades packed in it were pressing their white faces against the netting, peering with curiosity at their new surroundings.

AMBULANCES were taking away the wounded from the casualty clearing station in Albert. Lorries were packed with the lighter casualties who waited their turn in big groups, all labelled with the nature of their wounds . . .

Roads were crammed with marching troops and lorries. Dust was rising everywhere. Lines of cavalry horses, contentedly munching hay, covered the rolling plains as far as Amiens, hidden in the darkness.

On July 2 the Reserve Army came into the line, having taken over the shattered 8th and 10th Corps from the Fourth Army the previous evening. The orders for renewing the attack were cancelled. Our headquarters were advanced to Toutencourt, a typical Somme village, with its little church, a square called the Grand' Place, a château (only in name!) and farms with



#### LOOKING BACK ACROSS THE YEARS

Here is the present-day scene on Usna Hill, across which M. Maze walked during the battle of the Somme, looking towards Thiepval where the memorial arch to the missing, seen also in page 655, shines in the summer sun. Twenty-two years ago the white mass in the foreground was a British trench, part of a blood-drenched battlefield. Usna and Tara hills, so named by the Irish troops who fought there, stand respectively on the north and south of the Albert-Bapaume Road.

W. A. Davis, copyright A.P. Ltd.

clay walls. We had difficulty in fitting in our daily-growing establishment.

General Gough sent me to Owillers and La Boisselle to find out the conditions there; if possible I was to make a sketch from a certain place. The Brigade Headquarters I had first to report at were in the trenches of Marsh Valley. Taking a short cut, I walked over the open across Usna Hill. Scattered in pits all over the place our field-guns were firing. I was nearly shaken out of my life. Terrified, I ran down towards Marsh Valley, dodging about over the rough ground as each sharp detonation displaced the air around me. I was indeed relieved to find a communication trench, into which I jumped.

It led to a dug-out where, deep down in a tiny stuffy room, a General was writing out his orders. When I explained what I had come to do, he at once detailed a man to take me up to the front line. I stood watching my guide putting on his kit, squeezing his head into his steel helmet, grimacing as he tucked the strap under his chin. Picking up his rifle he slung it over his shoulder, and without a word started towards the front line. Along a monotonous, dazzling, chalky trench we walked, seeing a streak of blue sky above and the sandbags drifting past. As each corner of a

traverse eclipsed my companion for a second or two, I had the illusion of following my own shadow. I screwed up my neck looking for La Boisselle; all I could see of it were more sandbags over which smoke was drifting, following a succession of violent reports.

We walked on; I could hear shells whining through the air, exploding ahead in a straight line towards the direction we were making for.

I wanted to wait, but my guide strode on. I could still follow the whistling rush of each shell bursting nearer and nearer, until one landed in the next traverse and made everything rock with the violence of its explosion. Covered in earth, my heart racing, I looked at my runner, who, doubled up, had his chin between his knees as if he had been trying to squeeze his whole body under his steel helmet. I was relieved when he moved, unhurt. We moved on again.

The firing, without easing off, lifted over our heads and followed a perfect course down the trench we had come up. A few yards farther on mutilated bodies were lying amidst fallen earth and tumbled sandbags, directly where the parapet had been blown in. In the next traverse stood a group of wounded men, white and shaken, with blood oozing out of their riddled tunics. We helped some of them into a dug-out where



#### **MINES THAT CHANGED THE FACE OF THE LAND**

Two minutes before zero hour on July 1, two large mines under the German front line near La Boisselle, which had been made by the 179th Tunnelling Company R.E. in the neighbourhood of La Boisselle, were fired. The larger one, seen in the upper photograph in wartime, contained 60,000 lb. of ammonal, the explosion making a crater 100 yards wide and 70 feet deep. Below is the smaller mine as it is today. Time and weather have already softened its outlines.

*Photos, Imperial War Museum and W. A. Davis, copyright A.P. Ltd.*

others had been already carried to safety. The enemy had the range of every trench, and they shelled them day and night. By the time I had reached the front line my interest in La Boisselle had nearly gone.

Through a gap between two sandbags I was shown the village, where smoke was drifting across skeletons of trees on a torn-up mound. An uneven line of sandbags, stretching across piles of bricks and remnants of houses, faced our front trench. The enemy was there, a few yards away. His presence, so near and yet unseen, made upon me an uncanny impression.

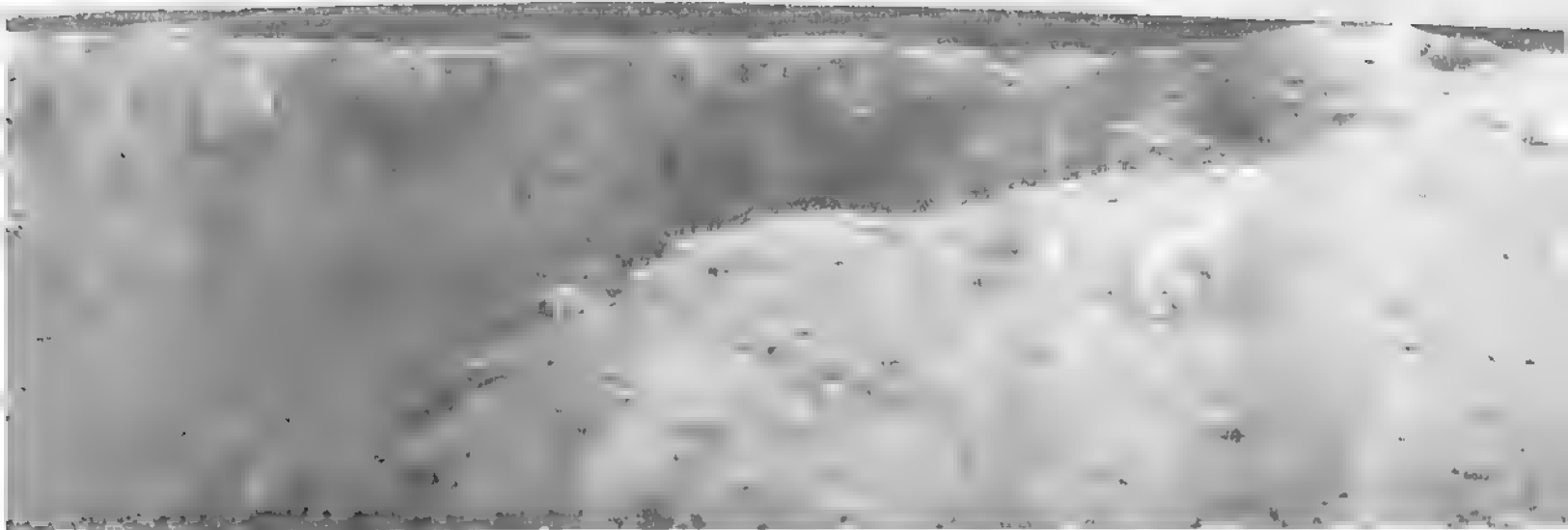
The ground between our trench and the ruins beyond was merely a stretch of craters and burnt-up grass broken up by tangled wire, not unlike gorse bushes. The dead were lying there in all conceivable attitudes, rotting in the sun. A veil of fumes from lachrymatory shells was rolling along the ground . . . with the heat the smell had become very trying.

A small attack was to be made on the place that night. As I intended to see it, I went back to Brigade Headquarters to rest. The General was still busy with his plans.

**L**ATE that night I followed a company going up to the front line, making room all the way up for stretcher-bearers moving down with their casualties. The trench was narrow, and we had to squeeze past each man; in the darkness no one spoke.

I found the battalion preparing for the attack. A heavy dew had made the ground clammy and slippery. It grew cold. . . .

Shells fired from Usna Hill were shrieking over our heads, crashing one after the other a little way beyond in



that mysterious gap. After an anxious wait the men began assembling round the scaling ladders and got ready to climb on to the high parapet.

Amongst much older men a young Tommy was awaiting his turn. He seemed weighed down by his kit and the loose belts of extra ammunition hanging from his shoulders; his small head was buried beneath his tin helmet. In a long nervous hand he held a rifle with fixed bayonet, and looked anything but anxious to use it. Heavy thoughts seemed to be in that boy's mind, and the lack of enthusiasm displayed by the rest filled me with misgivings as to the ultimate success of the attack. Vitality is low at that hour.

**T**HEY were all moving slowly and in silence while the officers, apparently keyed up, were now gazing at their watches as the last seconds slipped away and guns from the valley were angrily spitting fire. The first man clambered up the steps, followed by the rest, who stumbled forward into the night after the barrage—black figures silhouetted against the flares, flooding the broken ground with brilliant light.

Machine-guns raked the open space, shells tore the air, bullets thumped against the parapet; wounded men were crawling back to safety, helped by a few terrified German prisoners. We waited—the waves hadn't got far. The few men who had survived the stretch of No Man's Land were scattered in shell-holes just on the edge of the village. Once again they had failed to reach an objective, which had already been obliterated.

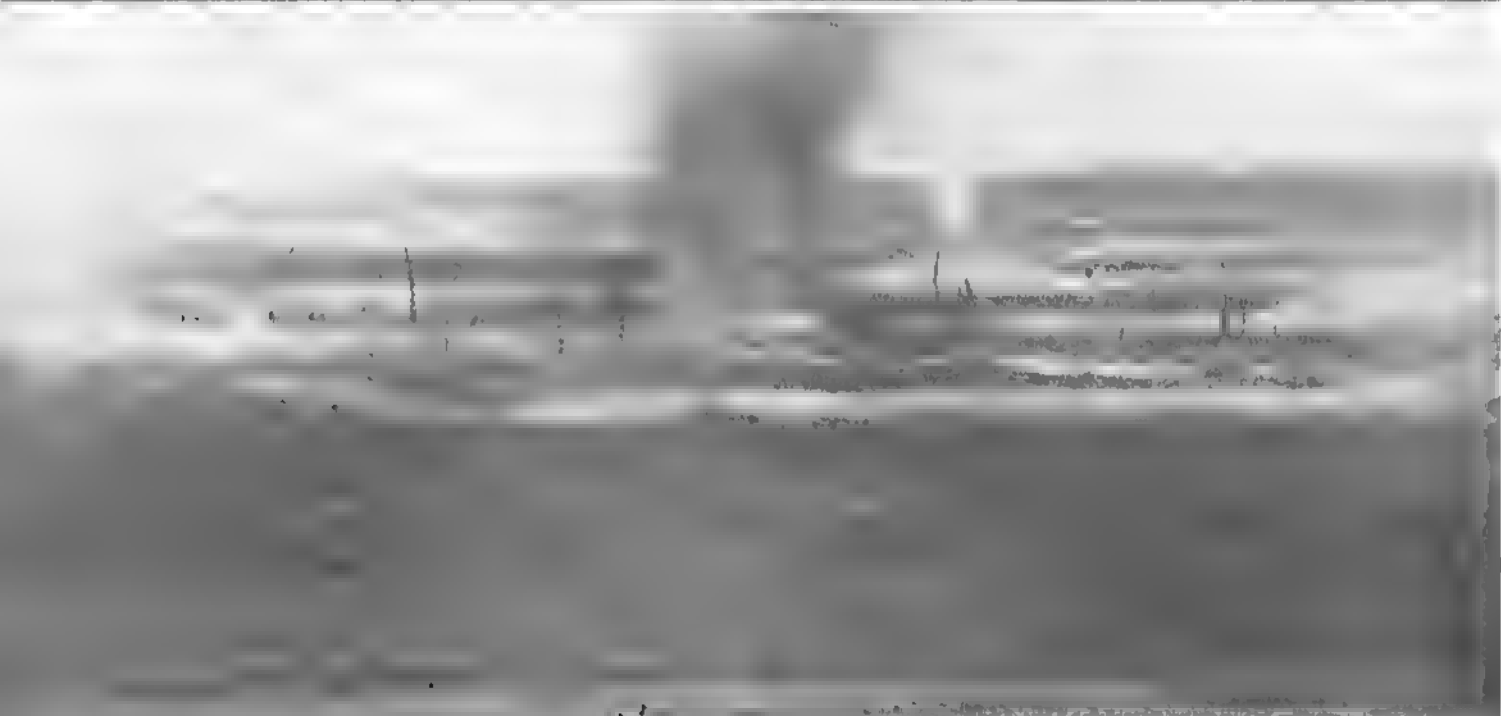
When day broke, fresh forms, lying ominously still, showed the cost of the few craters we had gained.



#### WAY FOR THE WOUNDED

The value of the mining operations was lessened by the fact that a delay of as much as five minutes had been ordered before the troops advanced, so that when it was made the craters were enfiladed with rifle and machine-gun fire. The British casualties were very heavy, and to avoid confusion as far as possible, certain communication trenches were marked for "up" and "down" traffic, those available for stretchers being also clearly marked. The photograph above of a stretcher rounding an awkward corner shows how serious such conditions can be.

*Crown Copyright*



## **TYNESIDERS WIN AT LA BOISSELLE**

In the top photograph the 103rd Brigade (Tyneside Irish) are advancing to the attack on La Boisselle. In the centre the preliminary bombardment of the German position, which was most effective, is in progress. The result of the action is told in the inscription on the memorial, right, which now stands on the spot. It reads, "In front of this monument on the 1st July 1916 the Tyneside Scottish and Tyneside Irish Brigades attacked the enemy for many hours. The fortune of war fluctuated but ere night had fallen the Tyneside Brigades with the help of other units of the 34th Division had attained their objective."

*Photos. Imperial War Museum and W. A. Davis. copyright A.P. Ltd.*







**BRIG.-GENERAL J. V. CAMPBELL**

Major and Brevet Lieut.-Colonel J. V. Campbell, D.S.O., Coldstream Guards, twice rallied his men with the utmost gallantry at Ginchy by blowing the hunting horn that he had used as master of the Tanat-Side Harriers, Shropshire. On one occasion he led them against machine-guns, killing the teams and capturing the guns, and later he advanced at the head of his men through a barrage and took an enemy trench, being the first man to enter it. Top, as he was immediately after the war; below, as he is now.

# **THREE V.C.'s OF THE SOMME THEN AND NOW**



**CAPTAIN E. P. BENNETT**

Lieutenant, afterwards Captain, E. P. Bennett, of the Worcester Regiment, won the V. C. near Le Transloy, Nov. 5, 1916. He had led the second wave of an attack to its objective and then became isolated with 60 men. Though wounded he remained in command, and held his position under heavy fire. Top, at the end of the war; below, today one of London's best-known magistrates.

*Photos, Fox and Speaight*



**MAJOR-GENERAL CARTON DE WIART**

A. Carton de Wiart, 4th Dragoon Guards, attached 8th Gloucestershire, won his V.C. as a Lieut.-Colonel on the Somme on July 3, 1916. After three other battalion commanders had been killed he took over their commands and held the ground won. His war record was a remarkable one, for besides winning the V.C., he was made C.B., C.M.G., and D.S.O. He was wounded eight times and had lost an eye in Somaliland in 1915, where he won the D.S.O., and an arm at "Second Ypres." Top, just after the war; below, immediately pre-war.

# I was **FOURTEEN DAYS** in **NO MAN'S LAND**

## London Man's Ordeal on the Somme

by Private A. Matthews

**T**HE author of this remarkable narrative was seriously wounded on the opening day of the Somme battle. Left behind in a disused trench he survived fourteen days of exposure before he was finally rescued by a patrol of the London Scottish. Instances of prolonged resistance to incredible suffering were not uncommon, but the story of Private Matthews' ordeal must always stand high in the records of courage and human endurance. He belonged to the 4th City of London Regiment, which was converted into the 60th (City of London) Anti-Aircraft Brigade (R.A.)

Fritz. Through the German first line trench we went, and on to the second without meeting with much resistance, and there we halted for a breather before proceeding to the third line. We were consolidating this position when my Company Officer detailed Private Cabel and myself to round up a few German prisoners and take them back to our own lines. After collecting them together we moved off, Cabel in front and myself in rear of the party, and we had hardly got 50 yards away when I

was hit in the thigh with a bullet and collapsed in a heap.

**I**T was obviously impossible for my comrade to have seen what had occurred; therefore he went on and I was left to my fate. Near by was an officer with a few men in an old disused trench, and I shouted to him and he immediately came and dragged me into this trench, bound up my wound to the best of his ability, and gave me a drink of water, as my own water-bottle had emptied

**T**OWARDS the end of May 1916, our division (the 56th), consisting of some of the finest battalions of the London Regiments, was withdrawn from the line and sent to Halloy to practice an attack which we were to make on the German position at Gommecourt later on in the year.

From the elaborate preparations we judged that the attack was to be on a large scale and were looking forward to getting the Huns on the move, for we were tired of trench fighting day after day, with only the excitement of an occasional bombing raid to relieve the monotony, and were therefore rather glad when about the middle of June we went back to Hébuterne ready for whatever the gods had in store for us.

**W**E found on arrival that a most terrific bombardment of the enemy's position was in progress, and, of course, he was repaying us in like manner.

July 1st was the day selected for the attack, and as the day drew nearer the bombardment increased in intensity until it was absolutely unprecedented.

In the early hours of the morning we took up our position, rations were issued, and we had breakfast, but few were in the mood for eating. At seven o'clock our O.C. Company warned us to pack up and get ready, and at 7.30 a.m. the order came along to go over the top. Up the ladders we went, led by our C.O., revolver in hand, and across No Man's Land to try conclusions with



**GOMMECOURT, GRAVE OF BRITISH HOPES**

Top, left, is Gommecourt Wood as it is today. There on July 1, 1916, an attack by the 137th Brigade, four battalions of the Staffordshires, broke down with enormous losses from machine-gun fire. In the foreground are the remains of the British trenches. The lower photograph shows the grave of a British officer buried by the Germans on the battlefield. So great was the number of dead that they were buried in common graves, but to this officer, for some reason now unknown, the enemy desired to pay special honour, so they buried him alone. The inscription reads: "Here lies a gallant English Captain, C. F. M. Lewes of the Notts and Derby Regiment. Killed 1.7.1916 near Gommecourt."

Photos. Lt.-Col. Selton Hutchison and Imperial War Museum

owing to the bullet passing through it. He then made me as comfortable as possible and took his men on farther, so I was left alone. I found it utterly impossible to move, even a few inches, as my wound was very serious, being a compound fracture of the thigh.

A company runner was the next man I saw, later in the day, and he very generously left me his water-bottle, which was a noble act on his part, for he did not know when he was likely to get any further store, and, of course, he soon went away.

**S**HELLS were bursting all round me, and it was only the shelter of the trench I was lying in which saved me from being blown to atoms, but it had the disadvantage of hiding me from anybody passing by.

After a few hours, things quietened down a little and I began to get



#### GOMMECOURT, SCENE OF A FORLORN HOPE

The attack on Gommecourt, of which Private Matthews writes in this chapter, was foredoomed to failure. The village, according to the Official History, "was in reality a small modern fortress." In the top photograph the ruins of the village church are seen with the remains of the immense mass of barbed wire that formed part of the fortification. On the ruins is a look-out with a klaxon horn to give warning of gas attacks. The lower photograph is of Gommecourt rebuilt as it is today.

*Photos, Imperial War Museum and Wide World*

impatient and tried once again to crawl, but it was futile, I might as well have been chained to the ground for all the movement I could make.

Night came on and I began to view things rather gravely. I shouted at intervals, but all to no purpose, for no one came to my aid.

The morning of the 2nd July dawned and I craved for a smoke. Fortunately I had a few cigarettes in my pocket, and found some consolation in them. Shells were still falling about where I lay, and

pieces of shell missed my head and body by inches. Luckily I had retained possession of my equipment, for in my haversack was my iron ration, consisting of five hard biscuits and a tin of bully beef weighing twelve ounces. I ate and drank sparingly, determined to eke out my food as long as possible, as it was obvious that I might not be found for days. Still I shouted at intervals, but the third day passed and nobody came to my assistance and I had come to the end of my food.

As near as I can remember, it was on the fourth night that I fancied I could hear footsteps, so shouted again and again, and I was rewarded by seeing the forms of men coming towards me. When they approached near enough, I told them what had occurred and my sorry plight, but, although they were very sympathetic, they could not help me as they were all wounded themselves, and had been lying out since July 1st. They had been feeding on the iron rations they found on the dead men lying about, and got me a stock before leaving me. They also promised to give information as to my position when they got back, and then left me. One of these men was named Wrightson, and a member of my own company, and the others belonged to the Q.V.Rs., Rangers, and Q.W.Rs.

**A**N hour or two later I heard footsteps approaching again, and they proved to belong to the same party, who could not find our lines, so they went off in the opposite direction this time. They did not come back that night, so I was a little more hopeful of rescue, but the following night whilst I was shouting for help they came back again, bringing with them some more water in a tin and biscuits, with a little rum in a bottle. They were now in a terrible state, one (Pte. Wrightson) was actually crawling on his hands and knees, as he was wounded in the leg and hand. I prayed that they would be able to reach our own lines safely, and they went off, but whether they got in or not I do not know, for I have not seen or heard of them since.

The following morning I woke to find that a shell had burst above me, blown in a part of the trench, and



## **LITTLE PLACES LOOM LARGE IN MEMORY**

### **BEHIND THE LINES OF THE SOMME BATTLE**

With the passing of time memories of many things connected with the Great War grow dim, but here are photographs of places, the names of which at once recall the great and terrible days of the first battle of the Somme. On the left is a modern scene in Bray, a village a few miles behind the line on July 1, 1916, through which passed the boundary between the British and French armies. It was a railhead for the latter forces. Bray fell into German hands during the 1918 retreat.

*Photo. W. A. Davis, copyright A.P. Ltd*



### **TRAINING CENTRE BEHIND THE LINES**

Picquigny, seen above as it was in 1915, will be remembered as a town where the training of divisions destined for the July offensive of 1916 was carried out. From trench maps and aerial photographs the enemy strong points and trench systems were marked out with tapes in a full-scale layout, and troops rehearsed all the exercises of assault. The photograph below, taken recently, shows the war cemetery on the hill on the outskirts of Picquigny.

*Photo below. A. J. Inceall, copyright A.P. Ltd*



Fonquevillers, near which the British were entrenched in 1916, for some reason escaped severe damage, though the front line was but a short distance from the town. The photograph above shows the new church that has been built there, and in the foreground is the café which was used as a battalion headquarters during the war. Some inhabitants of the Fonquevillers of today were there when their town shook to the thunder of the Somme battle of 1916.

*Lieut.-Col. G. S. Hutchison, D.S.O*



partly buried me. I managed to clear the worst of the earth away, but found to my dismay that the biscuits were buried and a piece of the shell had penetrated my water-can, and I was once again without food and drink.

For two days I was without any means of sustenance, and then it rained heavily and I caught some of it in my steel helmet, and when that had gone I drank from the filthy pools of water I was able to reach in the trench.

The time dragged on, and days and nights passed and I was listening, ever listening, for any sign of approaching help. Occasionally I would shout, but that was very exhausting as I was becoming by this time very weak, and this went on for about ten days. At times I must have lapsed into unconsciousness, for I had very clear visions

of some of my own pals finding me and carrying me off on a stretcher to safety. Several times this happened, and when I recovered my senses and found I was still lying in the trench I nearly went mad with frenzy, and the agony of suspense was unbearable.

THEN I began to feel that I was dying, and would read again and again letters I had received from dear friends at home, whom it seemed destined I was never to see again. I had lost all count of time, when in the darkness I was awakened by the shuffle of feet, and I managed to call out. Somebody came towards me, nearly treading on me, and it proved to be an officer on patrol with a party of N.C.O.'s. of the London Scottish. The officer questioned me, and as briefly as possible I told him my story.

He went straight away for the stretcher-bearers and soon returned with them carrying a stretcher and shovel between them. I was stuck so fast to the ground that they had literally to dig me out, and it proved very painful to me, you may be sure. Then as gently as possible they lifted me on to the stretcher and commenced their perilous journey across No Man's Land to our trenches.

Arrived there I was taken to the S.M.'s dug-out, given a good meal and had my wound dressed. It was in a very bad state, but, wonderful to relate, not septic.

I was nearly delirious with joy at having been rescued from such an awful fate. For two weeks I remained in hospital in France and my wound took exactly twelve months to heal.

★ 127 July, 1916

## A SENTRY amongst the BRASS HATS Some Happy Memories of Haig by Captain Allbeury, M.C.

WHEN Sir Douglas Haig succeeded Sir John French as Commander-in-Chief he moved General Headquarters from St. Omer to Montreuil. Guard duties were for some time performed by the Artists' Rifles, while they were also engaged in the extremely valuable service of providing a flow of young officers to the line. The author, afterwards commissioned to the Durham Light Infantry, here gives a highly entertaining account of his experiences as a sentry at G.H.Q.



STILL A TERRITORIAL

Captain Allbeury is here seen in the uniform of the Durham Light Infantry. He received the Military Cross at Vieux Berquin in June 1918 and the Croix de Guerre Belge in November of the same year. After his long service in the war he is still a soldier, being a captain in the Territorial Army Reserve of Officers.

ARRIVED at Hesdin, "C" Company was detached and sent to G.H.Q. proper at Montreuil. This dear old town always reminded me of Rye in a Winchelsea setting. Encircled by wonderful brick ramparts, it sat upon an eminence overlooking the smiling valley of the Canche, its beautiful roof-line four-square to the heavens. Though less than one-fourth the size of St. Omer, it had undoubted advantages over its predecessor as General Headquarters.

At St. Omer, for example, no less than eight or nine important roads focussed

on the town, necessitating a separate examining-post for each one. Here at Montreuil, surrounded by high walls as it was, entrances to the town were confined to only two: the North Gate, a fine archway at the top of the hill, and the South entrance through a gap in the ramparts. In addition there was a set of military offices round a wide quadrangle, known as the Ecole Militaire, which was sufficient to house the entire executive staff under one roof, complete with all their assistants and deputy what-nots, a great advantage over the wide distribution of St. Omer.

Haig himself took a smallish house called the Château Beaurepaire, about a couple of miles away, where he lived with only his personal staff. The administrative side of G.H.Q. quartered themselves at Hesdin, where the remaining three companies of the battalion settled down in the local barracks. This new arrangement considerably lightened our duties, and it was found that all the guards could be performed by one strong company.

Our billets, which we took over from the H.A.C., were in the picturesque little village below the walls, called Ecuire, and the next day I was in orders to do my first duty. It was not an important duty; merely Fire Picquet, but I was quite proud even to go on this. With the exception of the C-in-C. guard, all the duties marched up to Montreuil and mounted in the Grand' Place.

WE had no band, and the ceremony was very quiet and unostentatious, suiting the drowsy peacefulness of the place. The quarters of the Fire Picquet were in an empty shop next door to the A.P.M., and beyond the usual duties in event of fire, there were no other responsibilities beyond looking after the A.P.M.'s more serious delinquents, whom we accommodated in the wash-house under lock and key.

There was an off-shoot to this guard known as Night Picquet, whose duty it was to look after a considerable number of staff cars parked in the square. As

this was extremely boring and there was no likelihood of the vehicles running away, still less of any miscreant, unlike modern times, borrowing them for the purpose of joy-riding, it was not long before the sentry discovered that the rear squabs of certain front seats were hinged to fall back to form a bed.

This information was passed from relief to relief, and the job was looked upon as a sinecure, until one man making the fatal mistake of settling down before the visit of Grand Rounds, kept this gentleman perambulating the square for a solid hour. At last, failing to find his sentry, it occurred to him to start an examination of the interiors of the cars themselves. Finally noticing that the silence of the night was broken by a low sound which rose and fell with suspicious regularity and which apparently emanated from a particularly opulent Daimler, he opened the door and dragged the victim forth, after which, sad to say, the duty of Night Picquet became much more exciting and much more boring.

#### PORTALS OF THE GREAT

**F**ORTUNATELY, after one or two turns at Fire Picquet, I was adjudged smart enough to go upon an examining-post. This was much more interesting. Orders here were so stringent that no living creature could enter the town without an adequate pass.

A portable barrier on a counterweight was erected across the road. Here every officer or man from the highest to the lowest, every Frenchman, be he civilian or soldier, was carefully scrutinized and his pass checked before he was permitted to go through those sacred portals. There were exceptions in a few cases, of course, but these were confined to Sir Douglas himself and half a dozen great ones, whose motor-cars bore a special flag.

Three closely typed sheets of orders hung in our sentry-boxes dealing with a multiplicity of details for the guidance of the guard—the list of cars allowed unchallenged, the various authorities issuing passes and *carnets*, all of which were supposed to be memorized and recited on demand to the orderly officer on his rounds. French authority gave us the assistance of a gendarme during the day to help us deal with his countrymen, or else the traffic jams at such times as market day, for instance, would have been chaotic.

As it was, whole streams of traffic would pile up against the barrier awaiting admittance, often keeping the great ones free of the gate, impatiently tooting their horns hundreds of yards in rear before they could take advantage

of their privilege. The gendarme left us to it after sunset, when we had to do the best we could with the French tongue. Fortunately, some of us were fairly proficient in the language, but now and then quaint situations would arise which would leave the sentry at a loss till rescued by the sergeant of the guard.

**O**NE such occasion arose at midnight at the North Gate, when I found myself alone after a busy spell. Behold, then, the stillness of the dewy night, broken by the sound of hurrying feet, unmistakably female, ascending the hill towards the post. Two women presented themselves breathless at the barrier and demanded admittance. I applied my usual formula about passes. Of course, they had none, and I peremptorily ordered them to stay outside.

Still they persevered, repeating again and again two words, of which, though the components were simple, the full construction seemed to elude me. I remained adamant, and again were those two confounded words constantly repeated, accompanied by much anxious gesticulation. I could not for the life of me understand why they should want the services of—what on earth was it they wanted? A seer, a soothsayer, a fortune-teller, at that time of night.

At last they tried another tack, and the word "*piccaninny*" kept recurring. Suddenly light came to me in one illuminating flash, and I hurriedly raised the barrier, dispensing with the pass upon my own responsibility. The meaning of the two words which had eluded me were now quite clear: "*Sage femme*," not "*wise woman*," or any other sort of soothsayer, but "*mid-wife*"!

#### BULLETS FOR THE WINE BIBBER

**T**HAT we did not hesitate to use our full authority was evident in the swish of bullets which followed the flying, though unsteady foot-beats of a truculent and inebriated peasant who, in answer to the challenge for his pass, merely shouted, "*Allez coucher!*" a distinctly rude reply to a polite inquiry. It appeared that our predecessors had been rather lax with him, being used to his frame of mind at a customary hour, but the A.P.M. was very pleased with us over this incident, and we were not troubled again.

Of course, there were times when even our rigid vigilance relaxed somewhat through the use of custom, and then it was that we were apt to let ourselves down, and somebody made an entry who ought to have been kept outside. I myself was caught out rather badly

during my early experience. One day at the North Gate, recognizing a majestic Rolls sweeping up the hill, I hastily and very naughtily pulled up the barrier and stood back to give a perfect "*Present*." I say "*naughtily*" because I had no right to do such a thing with the car at that distance. I should have waited until there was no room for doubt.

Too late, I saw that the familiar red and blue flag denoting freedom of passage had been changed, and in the awkward position of the third motion of the "*Present*" I perforce had to let the car pass me bearing an Admiral's ensign. My compliment was gracefully acknowledged, but that was poor consolation to one who had neglected to obey his orders. Coming back to the "*Slope*," I yelled for the sergeant of the guard, with visions of my imminent arrest, court-martial and ultimate penal servitude. Quickly he telephoned the A.P.M.

"I know!" came back the reassuring answer over the wire. "I saw 'em! And damned well turned 'em out through the other gate! What next, rushing my sentries!" I was so elated at this misconstruction of my own negligence that I thereupon determined to be a good boy ever after, and a chance to redeem myself came in the very same hour.

#### HE WAS AN ANGRY GENERAL

**A**LARGE and unknown car suddenly approached. My barrier was fast down, and I advanced secure in my own righteousness to examine the pass. Judge my surprise when the window was let down with a bang and a large crimson face surmounted by a wealth of scarlet and oak leaves appeared at the aperture.

"And what the devil do you want?" said the face.

"Your pass, sir."

"Pass? What pass?"

"This is G.H.Q., sir," said I politely. "A pass is required before you can enter the town."

"Oh, is it?" came the answer, working up in a fury. "Do you know who I am? . . . Do you know who I am?"

"No, sir."

This was undoubtedly the wrong answer. My *vis-à-vis* had intended to overawe a mere sentry by indicating his badges as a major-general, not to inquire as to whether I was acquainted with his august name. I remained unimpressed, as major-generals at Montreuil were as thick as roses in June, and I was quite used to them by this time. I stood respectfully silent.

"I am a general!"

"Yes, sir. Your pass, please, sir!"

"Dammit, man!" he yelled. "I tell you I am a general. And how the devil do you think I am going to keep my appointment with the Director of What-not, if some silly fool of a sentry keeps me hanging about! Drive on, chauffeur!" he shouted to the imperturbable figure at the wheel.

"Don't move, driver!" I called, bringing my rifle down to the "load" and slipping a cartridge into the chamber. "If you move an inch I will blow your tyres off!"

My opponent fell back upon his seat with a strangled sound, a deep purple, his eyes rolling fearfully. Fortunately he was beyond speech, otherwise I should have been shrivelled to a cinder as I stood. Fearing to look at him farther, my eyes shifted to his companion in the opposite corner.

WHAT I saw was hard to credit. My first impression was a colossal wink. My second, a hand carefully hidden from my outraged victim, containing the desired pass. But I thought by this time things had gone beyond a joke, and after a suitable pause in which to see if my purple friend would really expire, and finding after all that he had only reached a state of coma, I stepped smartly back, raised my barrier, and performed the world's finest "present arms."

"B—y fool!" The remark floated out of the window as the car gathered speed. I had redeemed my sin of the earlier hours, but I would have liked to have met that A.D.C. again. After all, the whole performance had been conducted entirely for his enjoyment.

Incidents of this sort were all in a day's work, and I think, on the whole, we performed our job efficiently. It was not easy, and there were always complications, such as changes of car numbers allowed the freedom of the gate. Why, for instance, out of a fleet of Rolls-Royces allocated to the service

of King's messengers, only one or two at a time were allowed to pass unchallenged, I never understood.

However, these items served to keep us on the *qui vive*, and examining-posts were never dull in consequence. Even in heavy traffic, proper compliments had always to be paid, and the guard turned out in full force whenever the Commander-in-Chief approached, and it was often a relief indeed to retire at the end of a two-hour spell to the snugness of our guard-room (luckily situated in a small estaminet) for a few hours' rest.

June brought promotion to the General Staff Guard. When I found myself in orders for the following day, I asked a friend what it was like. "Sixty 'presents' per hour," he said. This I found to be no exaggeration. In normal practice, all field officers from the rank of major upwards are entitled to the full compliment, but at the Ecole Militaire every variety of general was so thick upon the ground that we confined the "present arms" to that grade only. Otherwise we should have had to remain permanently in that



#### THIS WAS G.H.Q. FOR THREE YEARS

The General Headquarters of the British Expeditionary Force from March 1916 to April 1919 was at Montreuil. It is a quaint old town only six miles inland from Le Touquet. Below is the centre of the town, with the church of St. Saulve, about 1916. Above, the Ecole Militaire, which was the central office of G.H.Q., as it was in war-time. At Montreuil the Somme battle was planned, from here Haig sent out his famous "backs to the wall" message to the troops in March 1918, and here the final victorious campaign was worked out.

Photos, Imperial War Museum





#### HAIG COMES TO THE SOMME

Sir Douglas Haig is leaving Sir Henry Rawlinson's Headquarters at the Château of Querrieu after a council of war, and last words are being exchanged before the Commander-in-Chief leaves to return to General Headquarters. He met General Joffre at Querrieu before the battle of the Somme when plans were discussed and momentous decisions taken. A photograph of the Château as it is today appears in page 682.

*Imperial War Museum*

uncomfortable position. Mere majors and colonels had to be content with the "butt-slap."

In addition, we turned out the full guard to greet the Commander-in-Chief upon his first appearance. Our guard-room was situated in the arched entrance to the buildings, and an electric bell-push was installed upon the wall outside, about eight feet above the ground, behind the sentry's back. Directly he recognized the C.-in-C. approaching, he would touch the button with the point of his bayonet and the guard would bundle out and range themselves upon his flank, when the compliment would be paid with full honours. The sentry had to be very quick if the whole business were to be done in time, as other buildings blocked his view of Sir Douglas's approach till he was within thirty yards of the entrance.

**I** REMEMBER being caught out one morning in my early days. I had just been relieved after a particularly heavy spell with generals. I eased the belt of my equipment and opened my collar. Hardly had I done so, before the bell rang heralding the C.-in-C.'s arrival. We rushed out, with myself in the rear, fumbling at the fastenings of my belt. Too late, I was cut off in the doorway

by a passing car. I dodged back into the room, hoping I had not been noticed. From without I heard a stern voice say:

"That won't do, Sergeant! Go back and turn out properly!"

**SIR DOUGLAS HAIG** waited where he stood whilst we did the whole business over again in high mortification. Very little ever escaped those observant eyes, which reminds me of another day when those same eyes saw the quandary of a young soldier and upheld him in such a manner that the young soldier's tunic buttons nearly burst with pride. It happened in this way:

Sir Douglas's arrival had been greeted in the usual manner, and the guard had returned to its quarters, leaving me outside as sentry. Shortly afterwards I saw him approaching alone up the hill upon my left. I prepared to give him all I could in a perfect "present," when I was suddenly conscious of another highly placed general walking towards me on the pavement upon which I was posted, but from my other flank.

This gentleman appeared deep in thought, for he walked with bowed head and his hands behind his back. I sensed that his path would eventually take him immediately between my back and the wall, and there arose in my mind what

I had been told about the enormity of the offence of sentries allowing persons to get between themselves and the object of the guard. At the same time the Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France was almost level with me and must be saluted in the prescribed manner. What was a poor sentry to do?

**S**O far as I could see, only one thing remained, and I risked it. With my utmost energy I began my salute. One! My hand flew to the small of the butt with a resounding bang! Two! I carried my rifle before me, hitting the sling against the side of its stock with a thwack. Three! I brought it down in front of me in the last movement with a catch-hold motion which had cost me hours of private practice to perfect, at the same time bringing my right foot back into a terrific stamp—upon the toe of the highly-placed general whose promenade had by this time brought him immediately behind me.

#### 'QUITE RIGHT!' SAID HAIG

**T**HERE WAS a sharp grunt, whereupon he disengaged himself and altered his course round in front of me. I stood as still as death, awaiting the consequences.

"Quite right, sentry!" came Sir Douglas's voice. "General So-and-so, never let me see you go behind a sentry again, sir!"

Need I add that the glow of my righteous countenance outshone the gleaming brightness of my buttons. After all, I was only just nineteen!

It was not always easy for the sentry to pay the correct compliments to officers leaving the building, as they had of necessity to approach from his rear.

**I**N order to help us, the traffic control policeman would from his more elastic position give us the tip, and we would "Present Arms" or "Butt-tap" according to his signal. But sometimes even he would prove a broken reed, and I have slapped my rifle with a resounding bang to nothing more exalted than a sergeant-major! And how great is the mortification of so doing.

I do not know what happened to Dress Regulations in those days. As the war progressed these warrant officers attached to the staff, secure in their increased pay, would get themselves up in kit which not only aped their seniors, but in some cases outshone them. I have seen an R.S.M. got up in a collar and tie based upon a magnificent pair of polo boots, which would have done credit to a colonel in the Guards.

What blame then to a poor sentry presenting arms to one of these magnificent personages!

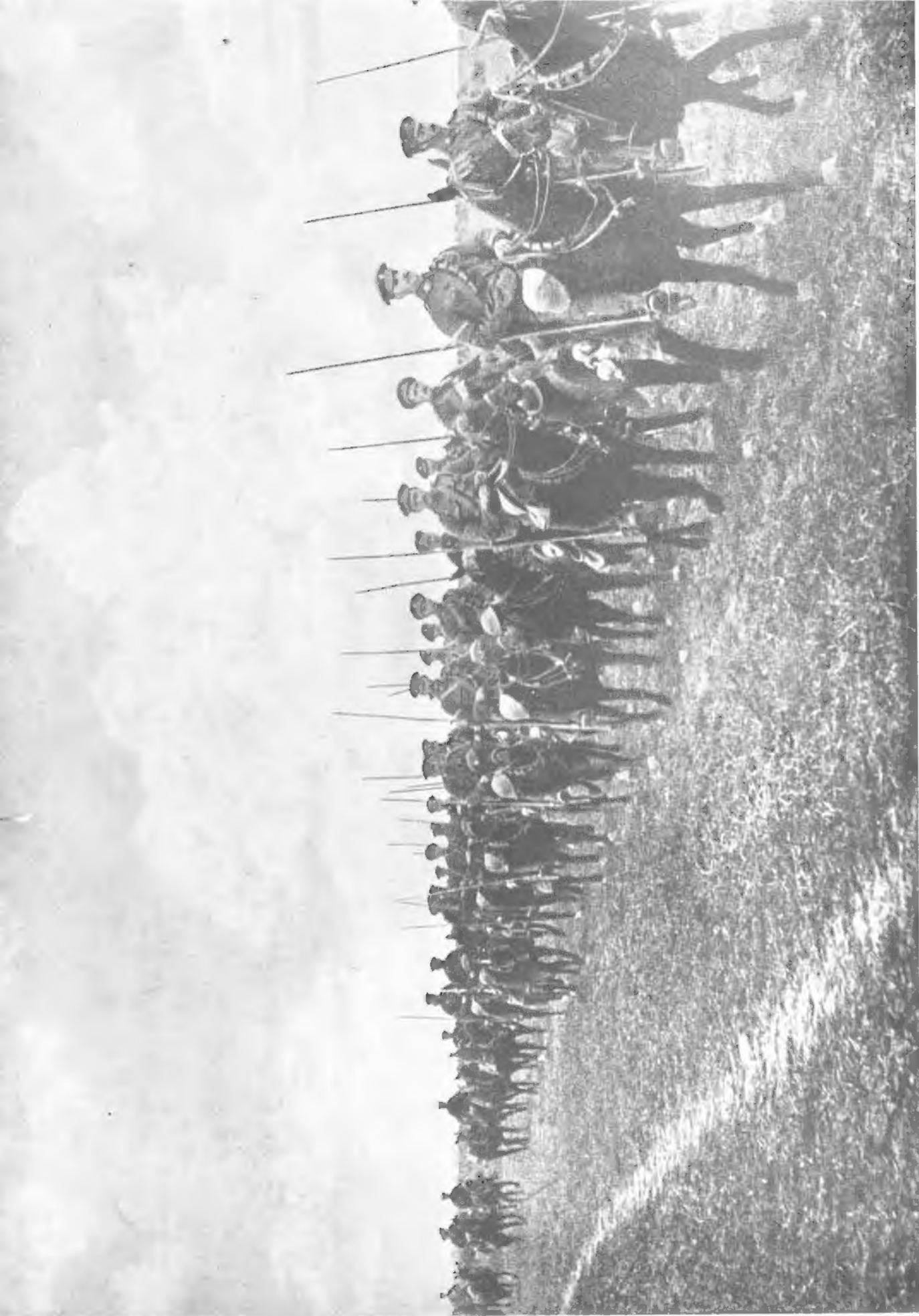


#### **CAMARADERIE FOR A SOMME CAPTURE**

Out of the fury of the first Somme battle these four fighting men have come, and while a British stalwart assists a Jerry to support a wounded fellow-prisoner, another Tommy gives the casualty succour from a water-bottle. Throughout the conflict the wounded who were made prisoner received decent treatment, and little bitterness was shown by captors or captives to the victims of the battlefield.

*Imperial War Museum*





**THEY WAITED FOR THE BREAK-THROUGH THAT NEVER CAME**  
In the elaborate plans which had been drawn up for the first Somme offensive, provision was made for the use of cavalry—in the event of the preliminary infantry attacks meeting with rapid success. Bapaume was to be the objective of the mounted men, and before zero hour masses of cavalry had assembled west of Albert. This photograph, taken in 1916, shows a body of Lancers on the move, ready for action. Their big chance never came, for the “break-through,” so earnestly desired and so gallantly attempted, was not achieved.

Topical

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## The Editor's Note-Book

(Continued from page 11)

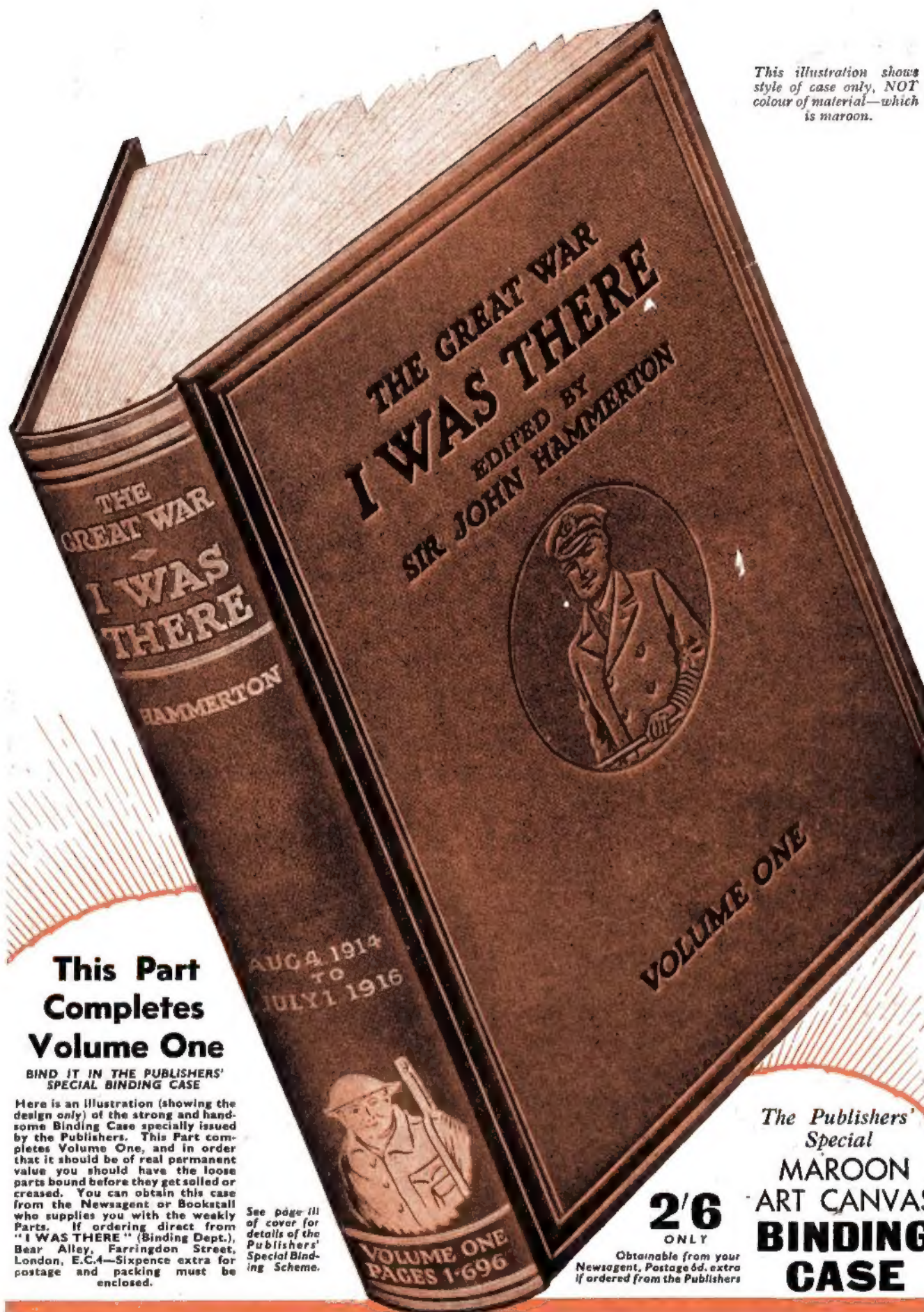
Robinson was a private in "A" Coy. of the 2nd Bedfordshires, and his story, horrific as it seems, is, I know, without exaggeration of any kind, for it so happens that a member of the staff of I WAS THERE was himself in Trônes Wood on the following day. I quote a few sentences from Mr. Robinson's letter:

"The first thing that greeted me was a pair of legs, but no body, cut off as clean as with a knife. Farther in, the dead lay in heaps, you couldn't move without stepping on them. . . . The wood was very dense, so we could not see far ahead. We struck off towards the edge of the wood and we came to a clearing where we could see a trench, and it

was lousy with Germans. At this point we lost touch with the officer and never found out what happened to him, so we returned to the main body and reported. . . . The branches of trees were flying about as bad as shells and bullets. We were troubled quite a lot by snipers, who were up the trees at the far end of the wood. Capt. Tyler said we had better try to drive them out, so he took our platoon forward with that idea. But Jerry had other ideas, and promptly let loose hell: we dived from one tree to another, and the bullets were cutting the leaves and bark round our ears. . . . Eventually we got back to our funk holes with the remainder of the Company. There was no rest of any sort, what with bombing, sniping, machine-guns, shells, wounded and dying screaming, the stink of dead bodies, it was Bedlam. . . . When we got back we found out that "D" Coy. were still in the wood and practically surrounded, so they had had a rougher time than us. I believe they were relieved that night by the Royal West Kents. Other troops had tried to take it before us, but up to that time we had held it longest, practically 24 hours. . . ."



This illustration shows style of case only, NOT colour of material—which is maroon.



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